

# The Outlook

MAY 2009

Volume 59 | Issue 5

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

The Courage  
to Pray

Filled With the Spirit  
on Pentecost

Press Release  
Combined Church Order  
Committee

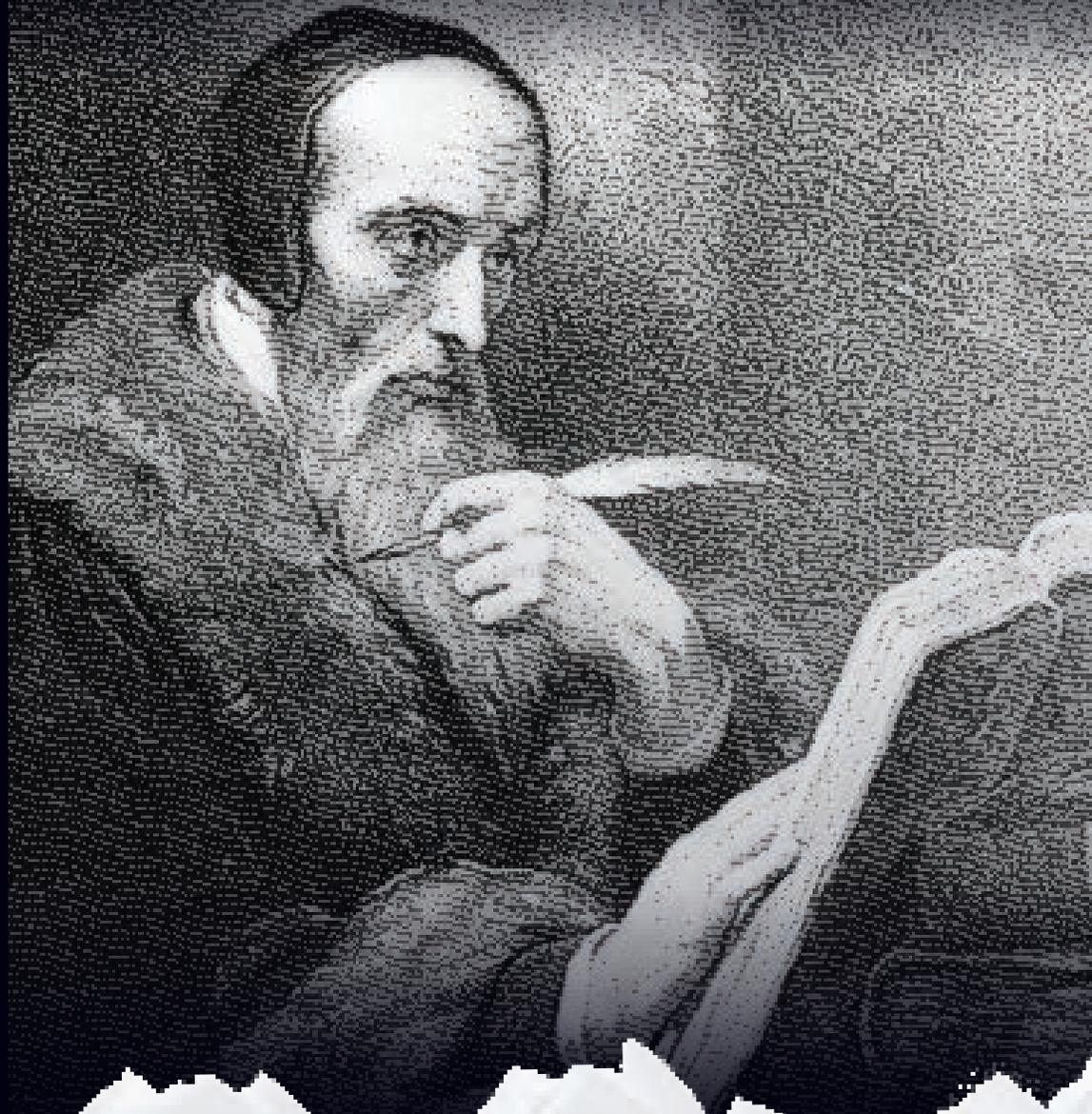
This is My Outlook

Calvin and Modern  
Subjectivism

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The Good Life

Bavinck, the  
Dogmatician (7)



# The Outlook

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*“And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, “The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon”.* (Judges 7:20).

### **Journal of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.**

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*“Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in the time of need.”*  
*Hebrews 4:16*

This month we acknowledge several special days: Ascension Day, Prayer Day, and Pentecost. Rev. Hyde has offered a meditation on Pentecost, so this meditation focuses upon Ascension Day and Prayer Day. Millions of people in the United States will gather together at noon on Prayer Day to pray for our nation. Many will gather together in churches throughout the country that same evening for prayer. Yet, only a handful of people will gather to praise God on Ascension Day for the glorious event that we read about in Acts 1.

Isn't it ironic? Here we are storming the gates of heaven on behalf of this nation on Prayer Day, but on Ascension Day, we fail to acknowledge the great event that permits us to do the very thing we are doing: storm the gates of heaven.

## **This Vast Universe**

Not so long ago I read a description of this great and vast universe in which we live. The writer put it this way: suppose the earth were reduced to the size of a period at the end of a printed sentence, that is, a diameter of only 1/50<sup>th</sup> of an inch. Now suppose that everything else in this universe were reduced proportionately in the same way and then we lined everything up next to each other with the distance also being proportionately reduced, as well.

On that same microscopic scale, in which the earth were reduced to the size of a period, the sun, which in reality is ninety three million miles away, would only be nineteen and a

half feet away. The nearest star, on that same scale, would be one thousand five miles away. Using that same scale, with the earth the size of the period at the end of a sentence, the farthest galaxy that we know of would still be almost eighty two billion miles away.

Wow! Doesn't that make you feel important as a tiny little speck upon this tiny little planet? It should make us feel very small and insignificant. We live on that little speck—that period at the end of the sentence. We cannot even be seen according to the scale of that picture. If we could somehow travel at a speed of 2,500 miles per hour, it would still take us several hundred years to reach the more distant planets, to say nothing of the stars. Our little planet is so small you could pack a million of them in the sun and still have room to spare.

There certainly is no reason for us to have big ideas about ourselves. We make a lot of noise on this little planet of ours, don't we? We toil and we sweat to gain possession of just a little piece of ground—a mere scrap in the universe. Nations fight against one another about setting boundary lines on this little speck.

The way we talk, one could get the impression that all the other planets in our solar system are eagerly anticipating what great documents of peace will be signed so that we will stop fighting one another here on our planet, as though the future of all the universe depended on the balance of power as we find it here on earth. One

has to ask, if you will pardon the pun, what is the point?

## **The Great Creator**

Holding this enormous universe in His almighty hands is God, the great Creator and Sustainer of it all. One would think that as the God who upholds this vast universe, He must be very, very busy. What a tremendous responsibility He has! It all depends upon Him. What power, what wisdom, what infinite care it must take to handle this universe and to preserve it and to move it toward its destiny. The little we know of this creation staggers our minds. Consider how great God must be to be able to know it all and take care of it all!

He made it. He knows every part of it. In fact, compared with God, this vast creation is small. The maker of a thing is always superior to the thing that he has made. In this case, God is not only the Maker; He is the Master of it. The entire universe obeys His will and serves His purpose. It cannot exist without Him even for one split second.

So here we are, tiny little people on a tiny little speck of this creation called earth, this little period at the end of a sentence in a billion mile big creation. And what do we do? We gather around the flagpole to pray to this great God. We dare to bother Him with our little needs and with our little wants.

We just open our mouths and talk to Him—sometimes without any formality—acting as if we can just burst in on Him whenever we want

to, even in the midst of His taking care of this vast creation of His. We take for granted that we can pray to Him anytime, any place, and that He is going to drop all that He is doing, so to speak, and take the time to listen to us.

We assume that He is always in the office, waiting for us to pray to Him with no appointment needed well in advance. No. Just come as you are, wherever you are, whenever you want. It never occurs to us that God might be too busy with other commitments to give His full attention to us. When we get up in the morning, when we go to bed at night, at meal times, and any time during the day, we just call on Him and we expect Him to hear us. We even will get impatient with Him when He does not answer us promptly or give to us what we ask of Him.

Where do we get courage like that? What makes us think that we have any business at all expecting the almighty God to hear us? Let me add this as well: we are not only small in comparison to this vast creation, but we are sinful besides. We have rebelled against this God who holds this vast creation in His hands.

We have absolutely no right whatsoever to come before Him seeking His favor. If we deserve anything at all, we deserve His wrath. If God were to deal with the people on this little speck of a planet the way we deserve to be dealt with, He would not allow us to have a place even on this little planet.

God cannot tolerate sin in His presence, for He is holy. His very nature will not permit the invasion of sinful mankind to come into His midst. And yet, the Bible encourages us with these words: “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in the time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Let us draw near with confidence! We can come boldly before the throne of God. The author of Hebrews gives us two very good reasons that allow us to do so. They allow us to come to the great Creator God in prayer.

### **There to Intercede**

The very first reason why we who dwell on this little planet can have courage enough to come to the almighty God in prayer is because Jesus Christ ascended into heaven (Hebrews 4:14). Jesus is there to intercede for all those who pray in His name. Forty days after His resurrection from the dead, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ascended into heaven. Ascension Day is just as important as Christmas; it is just as important as Easter or any other day that we celebrate on the Christian calendar.



Many people forget about the significance of this glorious day. They have no trouble celebrating the fact that the Son of God came from heaven as a little tiny baby to this little tiny planet. His coming to earth is very important to them, but His leaving earth and going back to heaven is not. Yet if Jesus had not returned to heaven, none of our prayers would mean anything. The celebration of Prayer Day would be meaningless if it were not for Ascension Day.

Christianity would be nothing if all we had was the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. For that matter, Christianity would be nothing if Jesus had risen from the dead but never returned to heaven. What access would we have to God if Christ did not actually open the gates for us? He is our High Priest who sacrificed Himself on the cross. Through His sacrifice, Jesus Christ gained the right to enter into the Holy of Holies on our behalf.

If we come to the Father in Jesus name, He will look upon us, not in terms of our smallness or our sinfulness. Rather, the almighty God will look upon us in terms of the greatness and the righteousness of His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. With Christ as our intercessor, we are not only declared to be without guilt, but we have a real claim on the blessings of God.

God the Father does that which His only begotten Son desires. His Son has been given authority over all of heaven and all of earth—over this whole creation, vast as it is! Jesus has earned first place in the whole universe because He has redeemed it with His own precious blood.

Because of Christ, we can come confidently to the throne of grace. We can come before Him because the Christ who came down to us as that infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Christ who bore our sins on Calvary's cross, the Christ who rose from the dead, has gone back to the glory of heaven into the very presence of this great Creator God. He is there to represent us. He has gone into heaven and taken our human nature with Him there.

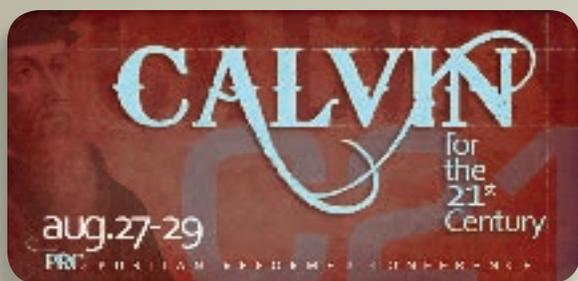
### Personal Experience

In addition, we have a High Priest in heaven who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Hebrews 4:15). He was tempted just as we are but without falling into sin as we do. He conquered all the temptations of life for us. He knows about it from personal experience. You do not have to explain it to Him.

Whatever your need may be, He suffered it, too. Whatever your temptation may be, Jesus will help you to overcome it. Jesus knows all about suffering and pain. He understands sorrow. Whatever the experience you are going through in this life, Jesus knows all about it. He can help us in our time of sorrow, in the burdens we bear, in the temptations we face, because He experienced them.

If Jesus is truly your Savior, Lord, and High Priest, then you have that glad assurance that He has passed into the heavens where you can come to Him with all your prayers. You can know with certainty that the one who has been given all authority in this vast creation is one who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. We may be small and sinful, but through faith in Jesus, the ascended Christ, we can pray to the great God of the universe, knowing that He will both hear and answer us for the sake of His Son.

**Rev. Wybren H. Oord** is the Pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is also the editor of *The Outlook*.



**Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary** will be hosting its first conference August 27–29. This year's theme is "Calvin for the 21st Century." The conference will be held at the Calvin College Prince Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Speakers at this year's conference will include Joel Beeke, Jerry Bilkes, Ligon Duncan, Michael Haykin, Nelson Kloosterman, David Murray, Joseph Pipa, Neil Pronk, Donald Sinnema, Derek Thomas, and Cornel Venema. They will be addressing a variety of ways in which Calvin can assist us in understanding the Word of God, the love of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, redemption, reforming the church, ethics, the benefits of salvation, and reprobation.

Don't forget to bring your book allowance! Reformation Heritage Books will have a large selection of books on and by Calvin and a host of other subjects available at the conference, all at steeply discounted prices.

#### Conference Pricing (per participant):

Early Registration (through June 26, 2009)

\$65.00 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Regular Registration (between June 26 and August 8, 2009)

\$90.00 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Student (includes college and seminary students and their wives)

\$45.00 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Look for online registration availability beginning in March at [www.puritanseminary.org](http://www.puritanseminary.org). Conference accommodations at the Prince Center are limited to 450 attendees, so sign-up early to avoid disappointment. Send all questions and/or comments related to the Puritan Reformed Conference to [conference@puritanseminary.org](mailto:conference@puritanseminary.org) or call 616.977.0599. You may write the seminary at 2965 Leonard Street NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525.

# Filled with the Spirit on Pentecost

## Acts 2:1–13

Rev. Daniel  
Hyde

How can we individually and even corporately as a church have “Spirit-filled” worship and evangelistic zeal? No doubt you have had this question posed to you by a charismatic or Pentecostal friend. As a former Pentecostal-turned-Reformed, let me give you a clear answer from the Holy Scriptures. There are two ways to be “Spirit-filled.” The first way is the way of man or the way of the Law. Recall Paul’s words in Galatians 3:2, “Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” Are we as Reformed churches going to “get in the Spirit” by relying upon the laws of church growth methods and programs, psychological research, or worse—by our own obedience? This is man’s way. The second way is the way of God, or the way of the Gospel. The classic text for Pentecost, Acts 2, speaks of this way. It is not a “how to” text of Law, but an “already done” text of Gospel. What it declares to us is that the church is a Spirit-filled organism and institution. This is the wonderful and joyful news of Pentecost in Acts 2. We do not have to, nor can we, do anything on our own to “get in the Spirit;” instead, we must simply receive the Spirit by the God-ordained means of faith.

### **Pentecost Had Fully Come**

Acts 2 begins by saying, “the day of Pentecost arrived” (Acts 2:1). What was Pentecost? It was one of the three required feasts for all Hebrew males (Ex. 23:17), which occurred on the fiftieth day after the Passover. It was called the “Feast of Harvest” (Ex. 23:16) because it celebrated the end of the barley harvest that the LORD had abundantly provided for his people.

Our text also tells us that Pentecost had “arrived” (2:1), or better, had “fully come” (KJV). The significance of the word that Luke uses is that it has a special, prophetic significance. The word he uses was used in the Greek translation (Septuagint) of Jeremiah 25:12 to say that the seventy years of Babylonian exile was “completed.” Luke also uses it in his Gospel of Jesus, to say that “the days drew near” for the Lord to ascend into heaven (Luke 9:51). Just as we say “time’s up” when the grains of sand fill the bottom of an hourglass, so too, the fulfillment of the Old Testament feast of harvest came in Acts 2. What the disciples were celebrating was not only the end of the feast, but the beginning of its New Covenant reality. Pentecost is the dawn of the new age, the beginning of the harvest of the nations, who would come to Mount Zion to be taught by the LORD himself (Isa. 2:2–4).

Pentecost was fulfilled; it is never to be repeated by the works of our hands, by the efforts of our feet, or by the mantras of our mouths. Nevertheless the benefits and blessings of that day of fulfillment continue with us today. On Pentecost, what our Lord Jesus Christ merited for us was poured out upon us (2:33). In the ensuing verses, Luke describes the blessings of Pentecost for us.

### **The Sign of a New Creation (2:2)**

The first blessing was that a new creation had come. In an insignificant room, filled with 120 insignificant men and women, the significance of that day would be made known by a powerful sign. No cool, gentle breeze refreshed them, but a “rushing mighty wind” filled

the room, signifying that the church is a new creation.

Think about this for a moment. We take it for granted that wind in Scripture often signifies the Holy Spirit. The question is why? None other than Jesus says this: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Just as wind is seemingly sovereign, powerful, and is controlled only by itself, so too it is really with the Holy Spirit. Let us look at a few Old Testament examples of this.

In Genesis 1:2 the Spirit of God is the sovereign, creative presence of God. “In the beginning God created the

heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1–2). In the beginning God brought into existence all things out of nothing by his sovereign will. When the earth was in its as-yet-unformed state, the Spirit of God hovered over it to fashion and to form it as a beautiful temple for the LORD. From the very beginning, then, the Spirit has been the executor of the creative presence and power of God.

Look also at Genesis 2:7, where we read, “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living creature.” Adam was “of dust,” meaning that he was made up of the same stuff that you walk on every day. Adam was dust, dirt—a lifeless lump of clay. It was the creative, life-giving power of the Spirit, the breath who gives life, that made Adam a living being.

As it was in creation so it is in redemption. Turning to the prophet Ezekiel we see the scene of a valley filled with dead man’s bones (Ezek. 37) and hear the LORD’s command that Ezekiel make them come to life by preaching to them. This preaching of the Gospel causes breath to enter the bones, flesh to attach to them, and life to enter them. The LORD interprets what happened, saying, “These bones are the whole house of Israel” (Ezek. 37:11). Once more the Spirit created, but this time it was the covenant people of God who were fashioned virtually from nothing—lifeless and decaying bones!

Prior to the Holy Spirit’s life-giving work in our lives, our souls were dark and empty, formless and void. We were, and still are, filled with depraved thoughts, full of darkness. We were that vessel of clay, dead in our trespasses and sins. The Law commanded us to “love the LORD our God and our neighbor as ourselves,” but we had no power to obey. Nor did the Law give us that power. We were a valley of dead, dry bones; a wasteland of spiritual and eternal death. But behold what God has done for us! He has made us a new creation—his church! He has given light to darkness, breath to dust, flesh to bones! As the Canons of Dort say, “What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation; which is the gospel” (III/IV.6). Not only as individuals, but also as the church of Jesus Christ are we a new creation that sings,

The Church’s one foundation is  
Jesus Christ her Lord,

She is His new creation, by water  
and the word.

Corporately as the church we have been giving new life and resurrected from the dead. We have been made a vessel of honor to glorify God through telling others about the wonderful

new life God has given us. We are not the frozen chosen, but a Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-anointed community of faith going into the world to spread this glorious news: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

## **The Sign of the New Temple (2:3–4)**

The second blessing of Pentecost was depicted in the sign of “tongues as of fire.” This was the signification that the church is the new temple of God in the midst of the earth. The imagery of fire in the Scriptures signifies both cleansing and judgment. All of those present at Pentecost certainly knew the story of the burning bush in Exodus 3. The place where Moses stood was “holy ground” because the LORD was there, signified by the burning bush. The image of fire illustrates the cleansing aspect of God’s holiness and purity. Yet the fire of God’s holiness also brings judgment, forcing Moses to the ground to acknowledge his unholiness. God’s signified his presence with his people in the wilderness by the pillar of cloud each day and pillar of fire each night. This fire comforted Israel with protection and guidance, but warned the Egyptians of judgment if they traversed its boundary.

Most important for understanding the “tongues as of fire” in Acts 2 is the account of the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34–38. When the tabernacle was completed it was subsequently filled with the glorious cloud. The Spirit of God descended to give his approval by consuming the offerings and filling the Holy of Holies with glory just as he descended to give his blessing to the first “temple,” pronouncing it “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Thus, all who brought offerings to the tabernacle knew that they would be cleansed as through fire just as surely as their offerings were judged in the same fire.

We know, though, that the people of God failed God miserably. The

prophets described this failure in terms of the temple and its priesthood being utterly defiled. The LORD spoke the gospel of a coming day when he would “suddenly come to his temple” and purify the priests of Levi as a “refiner’s fire” (Mal. 3:1–5). At Pentecost, the earthly and typological tabernacle passed away and was fulfilled by the heavenly reality, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself (John 2:21; Heb. 10:20). The prophets looked forward to him, the temple made without hands (Heb. 9:11), the temple whose latter glory far surpassed anything the glorious temple of Solomon could offer (Hag. 2:9).

What is so amazing is that as we are united to Jesus Christ. We as his church are also described as the temple of God. Luke records for us in Acts 2:4 that “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” The cloud and fire that descended upon and into the tabernacle of Moses has filled a new temple and its new priesthood. We are to offer up “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Do you see now why there is nothing we can do to become “Spirit-filled?” It is a work of the sovereign grace of God the Holy Spirit that makes us such, and not our works.

### The Sign of a New Humanity (2:4–13)

Finally, the third blessing of Pentecost is that there is a new humanity to worship the triune God in his churchly temple. We see this in the

audible sign of the disciples “telling . . . the mighty works of God” in the languages of the nations.

At Pentecost, God reversed the curse that he inflicted on humanity at the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9). There at Babel “the whole earth had one language and the same words” (Gen. 11:1). This led them to be elevated in their own self-righteousness even as they elevated the works of their hands in the form of a city ascending to heaven. But the LORD saw this and came down upon them in judgment, saying, “Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech” (Gen. 11:7). Thus he “dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth” (Gen. 11:8).

What is a curse in the world with all the divisions of languages becomes a blessing in the church. Because the church is a new humanity God’s gracious work in sinners’ hearts is what unites them, and thus undoes the cursed divisions of tribes, tongues, languages, and nations (Rev. 5:9). By his grace diverse peoples are reunited into one people, the people of the Lord Jesus Christ; and by this grace they are reunited into one Body, the Body of Christ. The prophets foresaw the new age of the Spirit in which “five cities in the land of Egypt [will] speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 19:18). Those who had once hated God and his people would

know him as Savior! And therefore, even now those once “afar off” (Eph. 2:13) have become sons of Abraham, in whom “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

What a message of unity and blessing; what a message we have for the world. In all our diversity we truly come together to celebrate and participate in Pentecost. Despite the color of our skin, the place of our birth, or the political ideology in our minds, we unite before the world as a witness of the saving grace of God in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

May we learn to live as this new creation! May we be moved to a more fervent love for one another as a new humanity. In this way we shall truly be “Spirit-filled,” Pentecost churches.

**Rev. Daniel R. Hyde** is the Pastor of the Oceanside United Reformed Church ([www.oceansideurc.org](http://www.oceansideurc.org)) and is the author of three books published by Reformed Fellowship: *Jesus Loves the Little Children: Why We Baptize Children* (2006); *With Heart and Mouth: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession* (2008); and the just released “*In Living Color*” (2009).



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Contact Carolyn Palmer:  
cpalmer@westminsterchristian.org

# Press Release:

The Meeting of the Combined Committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose common church order held March 24–26, 2009 at the First United Reformed Church in Chino, CA

Gerard J.  
Nordeman



*Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema and Mr. Harry Van Gorp representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).*

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Jonah 1, and prayer.

The minutes of the November 11-12, 2008 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

The respective 2007 General Synods of the two federations had adopted the recommendation to present to the churches the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) and the four-column comparison report for discussion and evaluation. Further, that the Committee be authorized to hold regional conferences to present and discuss various provisions of the PJCO. Thus far the Committee received thirty-two letters from Canadian Reformed churches and thirteen letters from United Reformed churches. In addition to the regional conferences in Central and Western Canada in 2008, conferences were held in Iowa,

Illinois and Michigan (March 11-13, 2009) and California (March 23 and 24, 2009).

The PJCO committee has received numerous communications from churches which have raised questions or registered concerns over a perceived development of hierarchy in the PJCO. At the heart of these concerns lies the desire to defend the authority of the consistory against encroachment upon that authority by a classis or a synod.

The following statements on the nature of broader assemblies are understood by the committee to underlie the Reformed church polity of the church order of Dort, and are thus reflected in the PJCO according to the committee's mandate to follow the principles of Dort.

PJCO committee statement on the authority of broader assemblies.

1. The authority that Christ

gives to His church rests with the consistory (PJCO 22, cf. Foundational Statement 6). Therefore when broader assemblies are convened they do not take over or replace the authority of the consistories.

2. The churches give broader assemblies the jurisdiction (i.e., the mandate to make decisions) only to deliberate and to make decisions on all matters lawfully placed before them (PJCO 21.d.). The Church Order, as agreed to by all the churches (PJCO 58), stipulates what matters are lawfully placed before the broader assemblies.

3. Members of broader assemblies are those who have been delegated by narrower assemblies (PJCO 21.c.). Once a broader assembly is constituted, the delegated brothers become members of that assembly. Therefore, each member

of a broader assembly serves the good of all the churches with respect to the matters lawfully placed before that assembly, rather than represent the interests of his sending body.

4. Broader assemblies are deliberative in nature (PJCO 21 a). Whereas a consistory may give input and direction concerning overtures on the agenda to the men it delegates, it may not bind their votes. Rather, it should write a letter to the assembly concerning its conviction. Binding votes would negate the need for deliberative reflection on the issues, and consistories could then simply send in their votes by written ballot. The size of broader assemblies should not impede careful reflection and deliberation, by being either too large as to make broad participation in such deliberation by its members unwieldy and impossible, or too small as to lack in depth and breadth of wisdom.

5. By common consent the churches agree to abide by the decisions of a broader assembly because a matter to be decided upon at the broader assembly has been lawfully placed before it by way of a consistory's request or an appeal.

6. The decisions of a broader assembly must be considered settled and binding, and must therefore be implemented, unless found to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order (PJCO 21 e).

Most of the available time was used by the committee to deal with many of the letters received from the churches and the comments and feedback from the conferences. While each member of the combined committee had been given copies of all correspondence, the CanRC brothers had prepared

proposals for dealing with the input from the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the URC brothers had prepared proposals for dealing with the input from the United Reformed Churches. These proposals were discussed in detail by the combined committee and, where deemed necessary, changes were made to the PJCO. It is not possible in this press release to provide all the details of these discussions and decisions. However, the following are some of the main points.

In order to clarify the language and to be more specific in its wording, minor changes were made to articles **PJCO 2, PJCO 10, PJCO 21.d, PJCO 24, PJCO 25.c, PJCO 26, PJCO 29, PJCO 30, PJCO 31, PJCO 36, and PJCO 43.**

More substantial changes were incorporated as follows:

**PJCO 3** -To included with the duties of the minister the following phrase: "visiting the members in their homes," and to change "catechizing the youth" to "catechizing and instructing the youth in the doctrines of Scripture."

**PJCO 4.a** -The committee agreed that the last sentence regarding theological students needed clarifying. It now reads "The consistory with the deacons of his church shall help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis."

**PJCO 7** -Regarding an ordained Minister without a Congregation Entering the Federation it was further stipulated that he may be declared eligible for call only after becoming a member of a congregation in the federation, only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision determined by his consistory, and only after sustaining an examination conducted according to the regulations adopted by the federation in the applicable examination regulations. Appropriate changes were made in the respective examination

regulations to clarify that such a man should be installed, and not ordained.

**PJCO 11** -The committee agreed that it is more appropriate to require classis involvement only when the temporary release of a minister is of a time period greater than one year.

**PJCO -14** -In this article as well as many others the term council is used. This may have led to confusion since council is not one of the four recognized assemblies in the church order. The PJCO attempted to clarify this in Art. 22. It is at times argued that Article 30 of the Belgic Confession speaks of the work of council as governing. However, a careful reading of Article 30 indicates that the church is governed by the polity taught by Christ, whereas it is only the elders together with the minister who are commissioned to rule in Christ's church. The three distinct offices and tasks are clearly defined. In this discussion it is important to begin with the concept of office. The office of elder and the office of deacon are distinct and each office has its own duties (cf. articles 17 and 19 respectively). The duty of oversight and ruling belongs to the task of the elders. They shall ensure that their fellow-elders, the minister(s), and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices. The office of the deacon is not one of governing the church. Just because the deacons are involved when office-bearers are admitted to office that does not mean that they should be involved in discipline, e.g. Art. 54. Suspension and deposition are matters of discipline, which belongs to the office of elder. This does not make the office of deacon any less of an office. Deacons have their own tasks and need to serve the church in that capacity.

When PJCO 23 speaks about churches in which there are small numbers of elders, they may perform their duties with the advice of the deacons. The deacons do then not become elders. Similarly, when then the number of

deacons is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the elders. The elders do then not become deacons, they only offer advice. The deacons continue to be responsible for their tasks, as do the elders for theirs.

In view of the above, the committee agreed to change the wording in the PJCO to “consistory with the deacons” where currently the word “council” is used.

**PJCO 17** The phrase “promote confessionally Reformed schooling at all levels” was found to be somewhat ambiguous. It has been changed to: “and promote schooling at all levels that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity.”

**PJCO 21.g** The section dealing with the task of the clerk and record keeping was incorporated in section f.

**PJCO 50** -The Discipline of a Member was also the topic in many of the letters and discussions at the conferences.

The meaning of the words ‘mature non-communicant member’, the ‘privileges of the church’, and the concept of the excommunication of a non-communicant member were not clear. It was decided to have one article about discipline with two sections: one for communicant members and the second for non-communicant members. To change the opening sentence in the first section to start with: “Any member, whose sin is properly made known to the consistory,” and to adopt the following wording for the sub-section Silent Discipline: “A member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from participating in the sacraments, and is thereby not a member in good standing. Such suspension shall not be made public by the consistory.”

The discipline of a non-communicant is now dealt with in a separate section with the following wording:

*A non-communicant member who is delinquent either in doctrine or life, who after repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory does not repent, shall be excluded from the church of Christ. The sinner’s impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may pray for this member. In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.*

*The consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member’s name shall be mentioned to the congregation and a date set for the excommunication, excluding him from the Church of Jesus Christ. The intervals between the two announcements and the excommunication shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.*

*The public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.*

**PJCO 54** To further guard against hierarchy the words “No broader assembly may suspend or depose an office-bearer” was added to the third paragraph of the article, The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer.

**PJCO 56** In connection with this article the committee was persuaded to change the heading to read: “The Reception and Departure of Members”, and to delete both section ‘c’ and ‘d’ from this article. A reference to members ‘withdrawing’ may tend to legitimize such action, while in fact it is a sinful act.

The **Appendices** will be referred to by name in the relevant PJCO articles, e.g. Examination Regulation, and Form for . . . , and together with the Introduction they will be included in every printing of the PJCO.

In **Appendix 2** the words “A medical certificate of good health” was changed to: “a medical report of health”.

Br. Witten was asked to develop a proposal for credential forms for delegates to each of the three broader assemblies for the next meeting of the committee. These, when finalized, will then also be included in the appendices.

Some time was spent at the end of the last day on the function and importance of Regional Synod in the spectrum of broader assemblies. While this concept is new to the URCNA, it has been part of CanRC ecclesiastical life from the beginning. They function in particular in speeding up the appeal process. Would the federation suffer without the benefit of regional synods? It is decided to revisit this matter at a future meeting.

It is clear that much work has been accomplished and significant changes were made in response to the feedback received from the churches. It must be remembered that these changes are not the final product and could be subject to further change as the committee deals with the remainder of the correspondence at the next combined meeting. This meeting has been scheduled for July 27-30, 2009 D.V., in the Grand Rapids, MI area.

Following prayer of praise and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for the work that could be accomplished in brotherly harmony Dr. Kloosterman closed the meeting.

This press release, as well as copies of previous releases can be found at the following web site: <http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco>

For the committee

Gerard J. Nordeman

# This is My Outlook

## The Proposed Church Order Meetings

Rev. Wybren H. Oord

Members of the Joint Committee of the Proposed Church Order have traveled the continent explaining the work they have done and seeking input for future modifications. It appears that the same structure was used at each site with different committee members reporting on different sections of the proposed church order. The meeting I attended drew a surprisingly large number of people.

We are grateful for the work of the committee who represented their work well at the conference. Rev. Van Woudenberg introduced the panel and read the mandate given to the committee by each Synod (URCNA & CanRC). Rev. Sikkema read the Introduction and Historical Background to the Proposed Joint Church Order. He also noted that “Foundational Principles” had been changed to “Foundational Statements.” He also said that those who analyze the Church Order must “be careful to read carefully.”

Mr. G. Nordeman offered an overview of the first section “Offices.” Several questions were asked, including why licensure was being taken out of the hands of the elders and put into the hands of the classis. The reply was that such licensure would not be limited to one church, but, since the licentiate would be exhorting in several churches of the federation, he should be examined by the classis.

Rev. Scheuers explained some of the major changes in the Church Order in the section on Assemblies. He explained why he thought Regional Synods would be beneficial to the federation. Rev. Scheuers, who has been president of the URCNA Synod twice, said that he considered the size

of the URCNA Synod to be unwieldy, and believed this would make Synod more of a deliberative body than the way the URCNA does it now.

Rev. Nederveen led the assembly through the “Worship, Sacraments, and Ceremonies” Section of the Proposed Church order. He pointed out that the article dealing with the type of songs to be sung in a Worship Service (Article 35) was the only place where the committee had not come to a consensus. Interestingly enough, it appears the lack of consensus came not over Genevan Psalms vs. Hymns but over who would approve what songs could be sung in a worship service. While that remains a flashpoint in the URCNA, Article 41 (who may come to the Lord’s Supper) was said to be the flashpoint for the CanRC.

Mr. Van Gorp led the section of Discipline. Article 56 “The Withdrawal of Members” was discussed at length. Some believe that members cannot “self-excommunicate” themselves, which this article seems to permit. The discipline of a “mature non-communicant member” was also discussed. It is peculiar that the first step would be to suspend him from the sacraments—something he should not be participating in if he has not made profession of his faith.

The meeting lasted well over two hours. Several times ministers and (former) elders argued that this new Church Order was usurping the authority of the elders and placing it in the hands of the broader assemblies. Members of the URCNA were reminded that they are a Federation that is to work together, not a group of individual congregations. They were assured that elders were still the ruling body of the church. Apparently, not many

were convinced. The buzz afterwards remained that the new Church Order shows a great distrust in the elders and puts everything in the hands of the broader assemblies. For example, if approved, consistories would no longer be permitted to grant licensure; that would be done by classis. Elders would no longer be able to invite someone to preach in the absence of their minister unless the individual was first approved by classis. Vacant churches would need Counselors; Church Visitors would no longer be “invited” to consistories but would inform consistories when they were coming to visit. Even ministers are told where they are supposed to visit the members of their church

In addition, if approved, Synodical Deputies would be present to oversee and approve almost everything a classis does. Although assured that the classis would still have the “final word,” one wonders how long it would take before that is reversed. This is the very system that many people in Michigan left fifteen years ago. It is no wonder that one church’s elders could be overheard to say that they had left that system once; they would not be afraid to do it again.

It is very clear the the CanRC members of this committee do not understand the great fear of hierarchy within the URCNA! One concern expressed over coffee afterward by elders from various churches was that the URCNA would try to adopt this church order even if the federation did not unite with the CanRC. Perhaps that comes because we have seen how our Synod has adopted things in the past that were never discussed in classes or consistories (i.e. the nine points and the invitation to the OCRC to join our federation).

When we think back to Calvin and his valiant defense of the faith we can only wish that to some extent we might be filled with as much love for the truth and hatred of sin as he was.

## Impartiality

When Calvin was about to die he had a deep consciousness of his lack of faithfulness in the performance of his duty. He had this consciousness all his life. Even so, if there is one mark that sets him off from others, it is his faithfulness in witnessing for his Lord.

He was faithful particularly in that he was impartial, and this appears especially in one particular trait. He insisted that the will of Christ must be done by himself and his friends as well as by his foes. He did not “protect his own crowd” the way we tend to do. He did not “cover up” for his “cronies.” He was not a “church politician.” He did not “wisely time” his attacks on unrighteousness. He was not “tactful.” He was not a “good psychologist.” He was not afraid that “his building program at Geneva” would suffer if he should speak the truth about the heresies and immoralities of the Genevans. He did not stop speaking the truth lest he should “lose his job” or his reputation as a “nice man.” To high and low, to rich and poor, to friend and foe, he made known the will and wish of Christ. He did this “not at some convenient time later” but here and now. Not that he was indifferent to consequences, but he left the consequences to God.

Yes, he was courteous. Yes, he was kind. He observed good form. He addressed the king of France and other authorities in language becoming their dignity and office.

Nonetheless he told them that their high authority laid upon them special responsibilities for the advancement of the cause of truth. We could all do with a “shot in the arm” of this sort of thing.

## The Subjectivism of Rome and Barth

Obviously Calvin was thus forthright and impartial in his approach to men because he knew that he could present them with the will of Christ, as clearly expressed in Scripture. Only if we really have in the Scripture the clear expression of the will of Christ do we have anything of telling significance to say to men at all. The Scripture is Christ speaking to us as the church and to us as men.

If we had something of Calvin’s spirit what would we do today?

We would, first, as Calvin did, classify *Roman Catholicism* with subjectivism. Fully appreciating the fact that the Roman Church did hold to some extent to objective revelation, Calvin yet took its method to be essentially the same as that of the individualistic subjectivism of the Anabaptists. The “Holy See,” in Calvin’s eyes, ultimately represented the wisdom of sinful man against the wisdom of Christ.

Second, we would classify *Barthianism*, too, with subjectivism. Perhaps our indifference to the Reformation principle of “Scripture alone” is the tell-tale token of the cancer of subjectivism among us today. Yes, we pay lip service to this principle of *Scriptura Sola*. But our “policy” impedes our righteous indignation with those who take away the Scripture from the church of God. Barth has taken away the Scriptures from the church of Jesus

Christ. He says that God is wholly hidden even when wholly revealed in Christ. And therefore the Scripture is said to be only a *witness* to the Christ. But if taken as such then the Scripture witnesses to a Christ in whom God’s revelation is also wholly hidden when wholly revealed. In the end the Scriptures and the Christ of Barth witness to the blank.

Yet as Evangelicals and Reformed Christians we keep writing articles and books to show how *objective* is Barth’s faith. Is it not wonderful, we say, that, over against the subjectivism of Bultmann, Barth insists on the objective foundation of the Christian faith in the Christ-Event? Has he not recently asserted his belief in the resurrection of Christ? He may, we are told, not always agree with us on the exegesis of Scripture; he may even do serious injustice to some doctrines of Scripture, but at least he is our ally against Rome and against modern subjectivism by his theology of the Word.

Yet all this is plainest self-deception. Are we to be deceived by a form of words once more? Shall we be deceived because Barth uses some of our *shibboleths*? Yes, Barth says that Scripture *is* the Word of God. He also says that the man Jesus *is* God. But then he adds that which cancels out and annuls these assertions. He says that in the words of the Bible and in the person of Christ God is wholly hidden. Barth believes in the resurrection of Christ as *Historie*. “How wonderful!” we shout. But Barth adds that the true objectivity of Christ’s resurrection is primarily in *Geschichte*, rather than in *Historie*. Herewith he cancels out every iota of objectivity in Luther’s or Calvin’s sense of the term. But to this we shut



our ears. We call Barth an ally against Rome. Yet he is in fact far more subjective than is Rome. We hail Barth as an ally against Bultmann. Yet Barth has dipped his brush in the same pot of subjectivism as has Bultmann. The Christ of Barth, no less than the Christ of Bultmann, is the Christ of speculation rather than the Christ of Scripture.

### Speaking the Truth in Love

I know where this sort of thing comes from in my own case. I do not like to be alone. I would like to have my little church and my little group to be in with a large and influential movement in the world today. I would like to be well thought of by Barth and the other great theologians of the day. But Calvin, following Paul and Paul following the Christ himself, require me to speak the truth. I must speak the truth in love. I have sinned grievously in not speaking it in love. I have all too often spoken it in self-love apart from Christ. But I must not cover up this sin by the far greater sin of not speaking the truth at all or clearly through my failure to distinguish it from falsifications of the truth.

### False and True Ecumenicism

Third, if something more of Calvin's spirit were in us than there seems to be at present, we would distinguish as he did between a true and a false ecumenicism.

a. A true ecumenicism seeks to have fellowship with and, so far as possible, witness to Christ with those who seek to make their thought subject to the Christ as he speaks through his infallible Word. Calvin was deeply appreciative of the work of Luther, Melancthon, and other Reformers. He sought them out. He took the initiative in trying to come to a common Protestant defense of the faith against the common foe, Romanism. Justification by faith was enough for him. But then it must really be justification by faith

in the Christ of the Scriptures. Communion, fellowship, love for fellow-evangelicals, by all means! But all this *in the Christ of the Scriptures*. A common Protestant witness to the faith, by all means. But not at the expense of the truth as it is in Jesus.

b. A false ecumenicism is based on a Christ-ideal projected by men who do not bow to the Christ of the Scriptures. We find such a false ecumenicism today in the *National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.* In the movement represented by this Council you will find the admirers of Barth's theology as well as the followers of other leading modern theologians. The influence of this movement has, in recent years, extended itself to the field of education. *The Christian Scholar* is a magazine published under the auspices of the *Commission on Christian Higher Education*. This Commission is, in turn, an agency of the National Council.

The Christ presented in *The Christian Scholar* is clearly not the Christ of the Scriptures. To believe in the Scriptures and in the Christ of the Scriptures, in the way Luther or Calvin did, would be, according to *The Christian Scholar*, sectarianism. Even the sectarian principle is, of course, good and useful as a contribution to the "larger church," only it must then be *reinterpreted* in terms of the "current theological revival."<sup>1</sup> The Christ of the "larger church" cannot be directly known from Scripture. Accordingly those who represent him on the college campus must not present to men anything like a world and life view in his name.

"A Protestant theory of the university demands no creedal commitment, nor a system of theology or Christian world view to be communicated to each generation of students."<sup>2</sup>

What must our reaction be to this modern ecumenical movement? Calvin showed himself willing to

“discuss differences” even with representatives of the Church of Rome. But he was unwilling to join with them in a program of witness-bearing to Christ, in the interest of opposing a common foe, the Turks. Shall we stifle our witness to Christ by submerging it in the witness of the “larger church” led by Barth and other new-modernist theologians? And shall we permit the virus of the “current theological revival” to be injected into the educational institutions of the land without so much as raising a voice of protest?

(1) Calvin knew that his people must confess the Christ before men openly and fearlessly, regardless of consequences, lest he refuse to confess us before the Father and his holy angels. In his day words were swords. He lived constantly in jeopardy of his life. Nothing but the grace of God will enable us to do likewise in our day. He urged those who pleaded the example of Nicodemus to stand up for Christ by day as well as by night.

(2) Calvin had brave but also a number of *timid colleagues*. In true humility and holy boldness he stirred them up so they might stand with and next to him in the common task of witness-bearing of the church.

(3) Calvin had friends who turned liberty into license, who were Protestants because they hated priests. The Reformer of Geneva insisted that they must be Protestants first of all because they loved Christ and wished to manifest their faith in lives of true obedience to the Lord. Men of every station must submit themselves to the discipline of the gospel.

(4) Calvin was basically the theologian of the Word and of the Holy Spirit. Hence he was opposed

(a) to the Church of Rome with its false claim to objective truth,

(b) to every form of ecumenicism that would lead back to the subjectivism of the Church of Rome, and

(c) to every form of sectarianism which is subjectivism in individualist dress.

May God in our day give us grace openly and unitedly to preach and teach the Christ of the Scripture so that men may not be misled by modern subjectivism even when it appears in the guise of the “new church” and “the theology of the Word,” leading men astray with a false Christ.

1. The Christian Scholar, Special Issue, Autumn 1958, p. 207. Article on The Christian College Today by Dr. George H. Williams of Harvard.
2. Idem p. 205.

**Cornelius Van Til** was a prolific author and great theologian who taught at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, PA for many years.



The Board of Reformed Heritage Christian School is currently seeking applicants for a part-time **elementary teacher** opening for the 2009-2010 school year. Successful applicants will be able to serve the Kingdom of Jesus Christ teaching His covenant youth. Reformed Heritage is committed to distinctively Reformed Christian Education in the tradition and devotion to the historic Reformed faith. Our goal is to train our young people to be servants of Christ in all areas of life.

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Attn: Mr. Dave Vander Meer  
Or email: dnjvm5@att.net

# Bible Studies on the Book of Judges

## Lesson 17: Judges 17–18

Mr. James  
Oord

Judges 17 follows on the heels of the tragic story of Samson, the failed judge. By now in the book, we fully expect that this chapter will be introducing us to a new judge. Israel will again be oppressed (or rather, they were still oppressed by the Philistines, since Samson did not accomplish his work), they will cry out (although in the story of Samson, they did not cry out, but rather were complacent with their rulers), and God will send a judge (although He refused to do so in chapter 10). As is evidenced by the plethora of parentheses in the last sentence, as the book has progressed, the cycle has become more and more diluted, with more and more detours, exceptions, and failures. In keeping with the downward spiral, Judges 17 is the beginning of the end. There is no reference to the cycle, not even a hint of anything we are familiar with. Everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes; the land was in a state of chaos. From Samson on, we are working toward the explosive climax of the book in bloody civil war and pervasive sin.



Judges 17 starts out in the middle of a domestic incident. There is no introduction. Rather, this chapter sets out to show, not tell. A man named Micah from Ephraim had taken 1,100 pieces of silver from his mother. When his mother noticed that the money was missing, she uttered a curse. The son returned the money to his mother, confessing his sin. This was not true repentance. He was just avoiding the curse. We often repent in the same way Micah did, because we are afraid of getting caught.

In her joy over the returned money, Micah's mother responded by saying "blessed are you." The aforementioned curse was turned into a blessing, and not just any blessing, but a blessing in the name of the LORD. These are good words, but they show a wrong view of blessing and cursing. "Yesterday I cursed you, today I blessed you, so now it all goes away and everything is better." It also shows their wrong view of sin. They thought that they could make it right and there would be no repercussions. As long as Micah returned all the stolen money, it was okay. Mosaic law said that if you steal and then confess (as Micah did), you were supposed to give back what you stole, along with twenty percent interest, as well as all the appropriate sacrifices for confession of sin. Micah's mother blessing Micah in the name of the LORD was a mistake, because the LORD would obviously not approve of their actions. Micah and his mother figured that the money was back, so all is well that ends well. Too often, we view sin in the same way that Micah and his mother did. They basically said that sin was no big deal. We do not talk about sin anymore in church; we talk about "mistakes." We always talk about Jesus as our Savior,

but never go so far as to acknowledge the sin from which we claim He has saved us.

In verse 3, Micah's mother continued her response. Her joy over the returned money was so great that she dedicated it to the LORD. So far, so good. In fact, this is excellent. However, she planned to honor the LORD by making an idol. She explicitly said that she "dedicated the money to the LORD to make a carved image." You do not have to be a Bible scholar to know that this will not work. Her lack of knowledge of the basic laws of God, even the laws as important and basic as the Ten Commandments, shows how base and sinful the nation was. Her heart was in the right place (she wanted to honor the LORD) but she did not give any respect to His law.

In verse 4, Micah's mother uses only two hundred pieces of her money to make the idol. What happened to the other nine hundred? She had said she would dedicate it all to the LORD. She made a bold statement, but then only gave part—kind of an Old Testament version of Ananias and Sapphira. But we do not know if this is a good thing or a bad thing. On the one hand, she should have given it all to the LORD as she said she would. On the other, she should not have been making idols. What a terribly confusing narrative this is; it can only lead to more trouble.

Micah put the idol in his house, in his conveniently located shrine. What was an Israelite doing with a shrine and a pile of household gods? He, too, obviously either did not know the law or just did not care. He also made an ephod (reminiscent of Gideon's idolatry) and ordained one

of his sons as priest. Only sons of Aaron were to be ordained as priests, and Micah was a Danite, not a Levite. These acts embodied everything that Israel was supposed to avoid. Deuteronomy 12 clearly says that the Israelites were supposed to worship God in the specific place where He commanded. At that time, the Ark of the Covenant was at Shiloh, which was not very far away from where Micah lived. The narrator states the obvious: everyone in those days was doing what was right in his own eyes. He also points out that there was no king in Israel. Micah did not have a Baal or an Asherah or anything else we have come into contact with so far. He had a “kosher” idol, an idol that was dedicated to the LORD. This is false worship of the LORD and a false priesthood, a mockery of the LORD.

In verse 7, we are introduced to a young Levite from Bethlehem. Levites did not have their own territory but lived among the people. Typically they were identified as belonging to other tribes, not as descendants, but as residents. Bethlehem, however, was not one of the Levite towns. Levites were supposed to be taken care of by the tithes of the tribes with whom they were living. Tithing probably did not happen very often during this lawless time. This Levite was probably having a hard time making it financially in Bethlehem, so he started traveling.

The Levite eventually made it to Micah’s neighborhood. Once Micah found out that this man was a Levite, Micah offered him a place to stay, asking him to “be as a father to him, and a priest.” This is ironic, because the first thing we heard of the Levite in verse 7 was that he was a young man. Micah offered him ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and room and board; the Levite accepted and moved in. The Levite was content to live with Micah. Micah once more took it upon himself to ordain someone, this time the Levite. At the end of the chapter, Micah

contentedly told himself that the LORD would bless him since now he had his very own Levite.

The days of Judges 17 can be suitably summed up by that old Broadway show tune, “Anything Goes.” The narrator aptly points out over and over again that “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” And sadly, our culture is the same way. One of the most popular songs of my generation screams out: “It’s my life, it’s now or never! I ain’t gonna live forever. I just want to live while I’m alive, ‘cause it’s my life” (Bon Jovi). Like Frank Sinatra, we pride ourselves on the fact that we “did it my way.” Our culture praises individuality in all things—worship included. “Whatever works for you” is the rule of the day when it comes to worship. The regulative principle of worship is considered to be some stuffy old puritan doctrine. We would rather make it up as we go. The worst part is we think that God will be pleased with it. We think that as long as our hearts are sincere, as long as we are happy, God will be too. We show a blatant lack of knowledge and disregard for God’s law. This shows the lack of a King in our own hearts.

God does have rules that are meant to be followed. Breaking the law, breaking the covenant, results in death and eternal suffering in hell. We can give thanks that God has sent a King, the ultimate Judge into our world to keep perfectly all of His commandments in our place. We are free from the burden of the law because we have the ultimate priest (after the order of Melchizedek, not Levi) who did not do what He wanted, but rather submitted Himself to God’s will so that we might be free. But this does not give us liberty to go out and do whatever we want. Rather, we should be abounding in thanksgiving for this great salvation! We should desire to keep His laws; we should delight in worshipping Him in the ways that are pleasing to Him; we should learn and teach His law

so we may better thank Him for His miraculous gift! And we should seek the transformation of our hearts away from singing “It’s my life” to “*Take my life and let it be / Consecrated, Lord to Thee!*”

For this transformation to happen, look to Christ! You will never be able to initiate (let alone carry out) such a transformation by using only your own faculties. If we look to ourselves, we will only end up like Micah and his family. It is looking to Christ, rather than ourselves, that will transform our lives.

Micah’s whole motivation throughout chapter 17 was the search for blessing. He gave the money back only because he did not want to be cursed. He hired the Levite in order to secure a blessing from God. Micah had idols, ephods, Levites, all sorts of things so that the LORD would prosper him. He thought that blessing came from having the right religious stuff, the right activities, that if he bought the right religious furniture, God would bless him. We do the same thing, except not with real idols or Levites. We think that by wearing a cross, having seventeen cutesy religious bumper stickers, wearing “clever” Christian t-shirts, we will be blessed. We think that because we were baptized and confirmed into the church, because we get involved with the church, because we go to church activities, we are guaranteed a blessing. Our mentality is “I did my devotions today, so I am set.” These things may not necessarily be bad but they are easily turned into activities that we think force the LORD to bless us.

We can never do anything to merit blessing. We were born under a curse and merit God’s wrath. Even when we repent, like Micah, we fail to repent appropriately. Our problem is not only the wrong things that we do; our problem is also that the best things we do are still tainted with sin. We are all desperately seeking blessing, but it is a blessing we can never achieve. We all tend to seek blessing in something

other than God. Christ is the one who came to bring us blessing. We need His works and righteousness. It is only in Christ that we can say, “Now I know that God will bless me because I know that Christ is my high priest, and also my sacrifice.” By the time we finish Judges 18, every one of the Ten Commandments will have been broken by Micah. We are all under the same curse. The LORD did not just lift the curse; He placed His own Son under the curse that we deserved. He died for our stealing, our idolatry, our self-righteousness, our religiosity, for all our sins. Because Christ has earned true righteousness, because we are in Christ, we are now able to say truly what Micah said falsely, “Now I know that God will bless me.” Peace is to be found only in Christ.

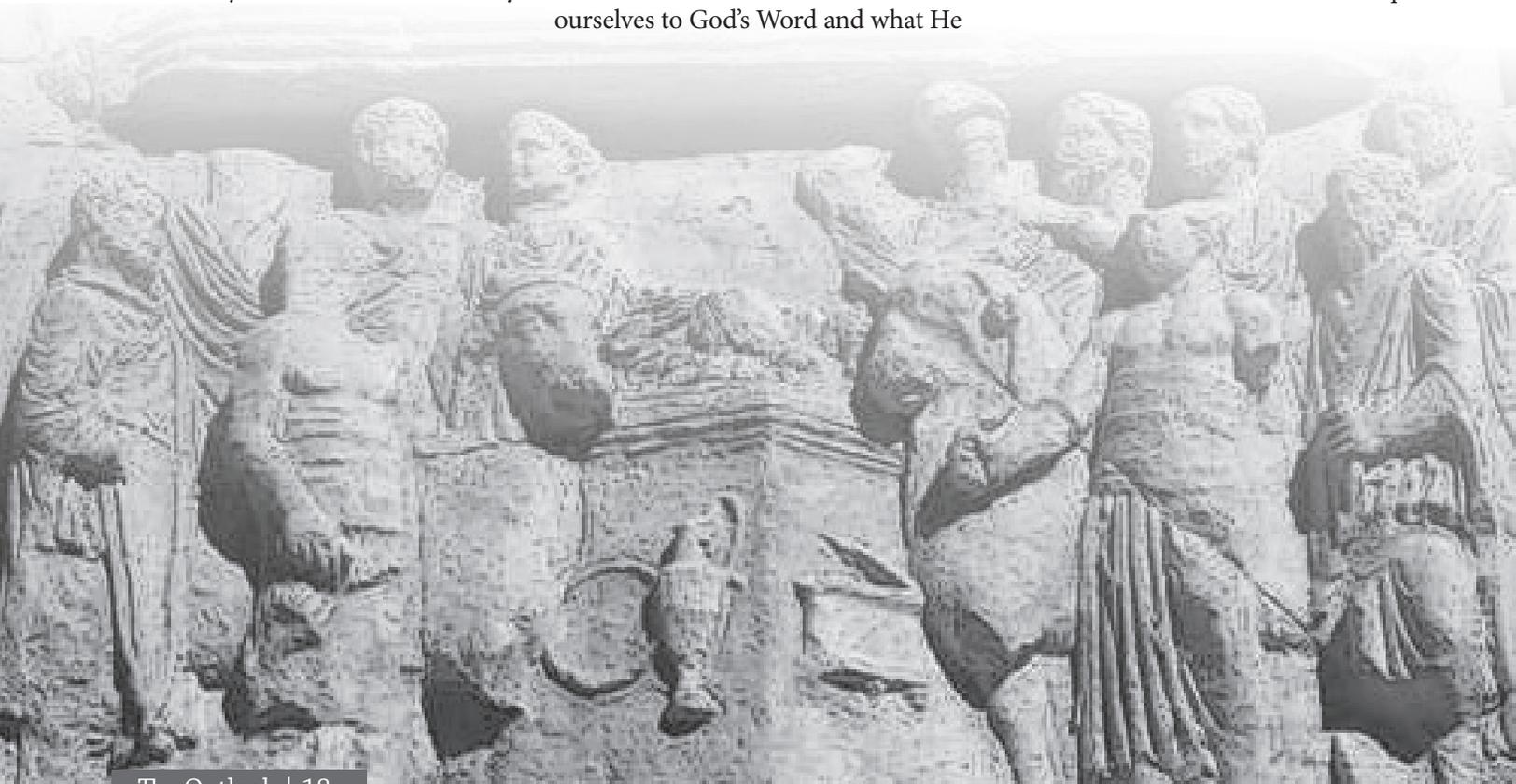
Judges 18 continues the story of Israel’s failed search for this true peace and blessing. In verse 1, we find the Danites searching for land, because “until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them.” But that was not entirely true. The Danites were given an inheritance, but they were not assertive enough to take it away from the Amorites. They

were not able to possess the land, so they decided to go out and choose their own.

They had been given the task of defeating the Amorites, but they decided to go with an easier task. Like Joshua and Caleb, they sent out spies. Their spies went into the hill country of Ephraim—that was Micah’s neighborhood. The spies went into Micah’s house and recognized the voice of the Levite. The Levite told them that he was serving as Micah’s priest. He was there for business reasons—for money—not for ministry. We often think the same way. We always think of ministry and the church in terms of “what’s in it for me?” “I go to this church because this is where all my friends go.” “I love our church’s young people’s group because of the food.” “I’m a thirty year old single. I love our church, but I’m going to a different one because there are more people my age to hang out with, and more single ladies for me to meet. I know that their ministry is not as strong, that they have weak elders, but . . .” We need to examine our motives in church-related decisions. We need to subordinate ourselves to God’s Word and what He

commands us, not what we selfishly want. Our feelings can easily lead us astray, making us think that we are really called to something, even if it is wrong (as the Danites really thought they were called to search for a new inheritance). We should question our motives. Why did you sign up for that mission trip? Were you shamed into it by your parents or pastor? Was it because you thought God would give you some “kingdom points” if you did? Was it because a girl you really like was going on it? We need to really sit down and figure out what our motives are, for if our motives are wrong, even the best of actions can be sinful.

Eventually, the spies found a place to stay in the land of Laish. Six hundred Danites set out. On their way, they passed through the hill country of Ephraim, the area where Micah lived. The five scouts mentioned that Micah’s house was full of nice idols, including that nice silver one. They told the Danites to “consider what you will do.” According to Deuteronomy, they should have destroyed the idols and put the whole household to death. Instead, the men of Dan showed up



at Micah's door and chatted with the Levite while the five spies went into the house and "liberated" the idols.

The Danites also offered the Levite a better ministry: "Come and be to *us* a father and a priest." This was just like Micah's offer. The priest gladly accepted. Would it not be better to be a priest to a whole tribe instead of to one family? The priest certainly felt led to this ministry, helping them take all the plunder. The man he was robbing from was one who had treated him like a son.

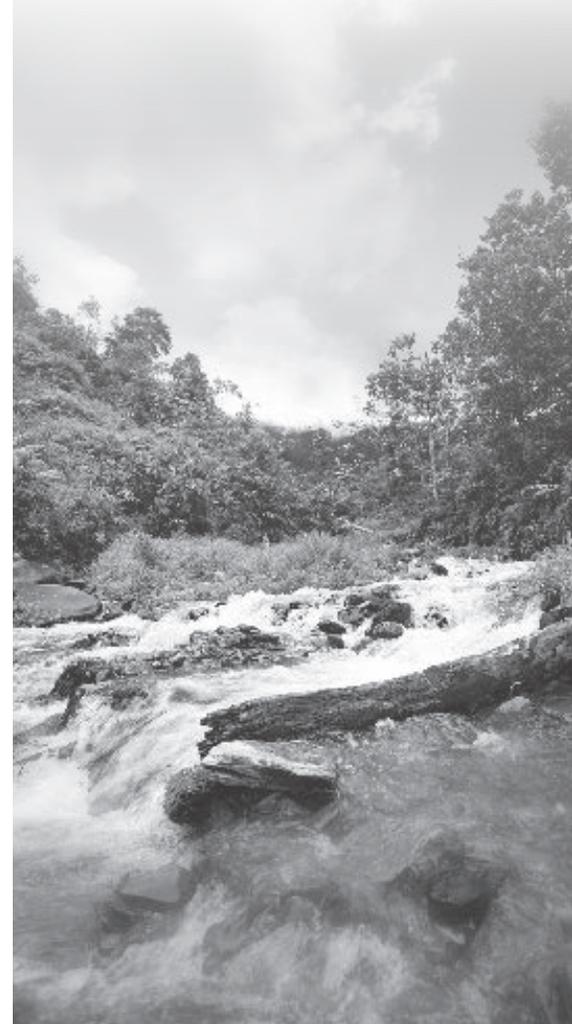
Micah and his neighbors came in pursuit. The Danites taunted him, asking "What is the matter with you? Are you missing something?" Micah's answer is pitiful. "You took the gods that I made, and now I have nothing." He had nothing before. Any gods that can be stolen from you and cannot protect themselves (let alone protect you) are worthless. The Danites responded, "Shut up or you might get 'damaged.'" So Micah left, dejected, and the Danites returned to their conquest of Laish.

In verses 27–31, we find out that the Danites were quite successful in their conquest. Three times the citizens of Laish are described as "quiet and unsuspecting people." We almost feel bad for these Canaanites; we like them better than the Israelites. But this raises a question. If it was as easy as this to kill the Canaanites, why was no one else out there killing them? All of Israel was supposed to be conquering the land, but no one was.

Conquering the Canaanites was supposed to protect Israel from idolatry and corruption. But the Israelites did not need any Canaanites anymore. When they captured their city, they set up their own idols and set up their newly-acquired priest. Finally at the end of the chapter, the Levite's name is revealed. He is Jonathan, son of Gershom, the son of Moses. This is a shocker! So much so, that a number of Hebrew

manuscripts and English translations insert "Manasseh" pointing ahead to the wicked king of 2 Kings 21. Such wicked worship would have been compatible with King Manasseh, but not with Moses. Godliness is not genetic. The grandson of Moses was now ordained as a false priest, the founder of a false priesthood. His sons were priests for the people of Dan until the captivity of the land, a long time. Then we get the final irony of ironies. The Danites set up Micah's idol at Shiloh, where the proper ark and tabernacle were located. Shiloh was where one was supposed to seek the LORD, and now it became a center of idolatry.

When we read that Israel sinned "because there was no king in Israel," it is a temptation to think that a king would be the answer to their problems. But if you read the rest of the Old Testament, you know that a king does not help. What was the very first thing that Jeroboam did as king? He set up two new temples and put golden calves in them, golden calves that he said represented the LORD. And he then ordained his own priesthood to serve them. The pattern of Micah obviously was not broken



by an earthly king. We need a better King, a better Savior, and a better Priest than anyone on this earth has ever had.

## *Lesson 17: Points to Ponder*

1. What spiritual anarchy is going on in Micah's house even before the Levite arrives?
2. Give examples of false repentance. How does this lead to a false confession and a false understanding of sin? How does this lead to a false understanding of why Christ came?
3. How does ignorance of God's Law lead to doing evil while seeking to serve Him? How does Isaiah 5:20 address this? Can we see this happening in our own society (i.e. abortion, etc.)?
4. What kind of idols and religious relics do we dedicate to the Lord? How can we avoid seeking out blessings from God by using such idols and religious relics?
5. Does "T-shirt/bumper sticker theology" have any benefit?
6. How did the self-promoting upward mobility of the Levite lead him deeper into apostasy and sin?

# Bible Studies on the Book of Judges

## Lesson 18: Judges 19

Mr. James  
Oord

Judges 19 is put in the context of the sad ending of the tale of Micah. At the end of chapter 18, we are left with the sad news that Micah's carved image was set up at the house of God in Shiloh. God's temple had been defiled by this idol. The story in the book of Judges is just getting more and more lawless. The downward cycle is continuing as we are progressing through the book, and Judges 19 is almost as low as the Israelites can get. This chapter is probably one of the grossest, sickest chapters in the Bible. You will be disgusted as you read it. It is meant to shock, horrify, and anger you.

That is the note with which Judges 19 begins—the repetition of one of the narrator's refrains, "there was no king in Israel." Here at the opening, we are introduced to yet another sojourning Levite (there seems to have been a rash of them in those days, which indicates that the Israelites were not following God's law to provide for them). He was traveling to the hill country of Ephraim. This Levite had a concubine from Bethlehem who was unfaithful to him. A concubine had all the responsibilities of a wife, but far fewer privileges, kind of like a permanent prostitute, a sex slave. The last time we met a concubine in the book of Judges, she had a son name Abimelech, and boy, was that a mess. This offense of adultery called for death according to the Levitical law, but it seems no one was interested in keeping God's laws in those days. This Levite's concubine ran away from him to her father's house. She was there for four months before the Levite took any action. If the Levite was really interested in her or wanted to smooth things over, why did he wait for four months? Did he really care about her? She did not seem very high on his agenda.

He followed her to her father's house to "speak kindly to her and bring her back." He did not come to kill her as he should have under the law. Rather than express anger toward the Levite on behalf of his daughter's mistreatment, the father of the concubine was more than gracious to the Levite. In Jewish culture, the idea of carrying on the family line was based upon having a good match. This daughter was not where she was supposed to be (with her "husband"). She was not carrying on the family line. This would be a shame on the family. Everyone would see that she was home and either know or speculate that she was unfaithful. The town gossips would start wagging their tongues, and soon everyone would look down on the family. So, the Levite's return was good news for the father.

In fact, every time the Levite tried to go, the father-in-law insisted he stay another night, then another day, and on and on. What is missing from this narrative? What was not happening that should have been happening? There are no conversations between the Levite and his concubine recorded. No "kind word," not even any spats. The fact that there are no recorded conversations, in addition to the four month waiting period, gives us a picture of the Levite. He does not care.

After the invitation was extended three times (and after five days), the Levite, his concubine, and his donkeys finally left. The Levite just decided to leave, or else the father-in-law would just keep inviting him again and again. So, he left in the middle of the night. Why was the father-in-law so hospitable? In the ancient Near East, hospitality was regarded as one of the highest virtues (as we will see again later).

So the Levite and his little band of people and donkeys traveled by night. Notice the word order in verse 10. The traveling party consisted of the Levite, his donkeys, and his concubine. She was listed after the donkeys; she existed only to serve him in the same way the donkeys did.

When they reached Jerusalem (which at that time was still a Jebusite city) in verses 11–13, the servant and his master had a conversation. Their conversation did not include the concubine. The servant and the master were the ones who decided. The servant encouraged him to stop in the city for the night. But the Levite refused. There was no way he would spend the night in a heathen, Gentile city. They were Gentiles, heathens, "and you know how they are; nasty things go on." He chose rather to go to his own people, whom he probably thought would be more hospitable and open to him.

When they got to Gibeah (a Benjamite town where eventually Saul came from), no one took him in. He probably would have fared better in Jerusalem. So, the Levite went to spend the night in the middle of the city square. The Levite had thought that his own people, fellow Israelites, would have treated him better, but he was wrong.

In verses 16–19, an old man coming in from the fields passed by where the Levite was resting. He asked the Levite who he was and where he was going. The Levite responded that he was on the way to the house of the LORD (this would seem to be a good thing, but then we remember that the last time we heard of the house of the LORD, they had set up Micah's idol there). The Levite went on to tell the old man that he had everything that they needed, so all they needed was a place to stay,

but no one had offered hospitality. The old man offered to put them up for the night, warning them not to spend the night in the square (he probably knew the characters of his neighbors).

As our travelers and the old man were eating and drinking, the men of the city (worthless fellows, we are told) surrounded the house. They asked the old man to bring out the Levite so that they could “get to know him.” “Knowing” is a well-known biblical idiom for having sex with someone, the closest form of intimacy. It seems the Gibeonite welcoming committee thought it was best to greet newcomers by raping and abusing them. This should ring some bells in terms of familiar stories. Before we go on, the parallel with Genesis 19 needs to be addressed. There are clear parallels between this and the story of Sodom. A guest is taken in, the men of the town want to abuse him, but the host intervenes, offering his daughter instead. This parallel is obvious. The sad thing is—this was not Sodom. This was an Israelite city. These were God’s chosen people, acting worse than the heathens living in the land. The Levite was afraid to spend the night in Jerusalem because it was full of foreigners. It turned out to be far worse to spend the night with Israelites in those days.

The old man replied that he cannot do such a thing because of his hospitality—he would rather let them have his virgin daughter and the concubine than to sacrifice his hospitality for a guest. Keep in mind, the text does not idealize this option. It does not tell us that this is what we should do: shoving out women to be abused if the case arises. This was not approved behavior in antiquity any more than it would be today. This is just another example of doing whatever was right in their own eyes. The old man basically said, “You can do any outrageous thing, just not to my guest.”

The men were not tempted with the offer and demanded the Levite. They did not listen. So “the man” seized the

concubine and pushed her out into the hands of the perverted Gibeonites. The text just refers to the shover as “the man,” which could refer to the old man or the Levite. It probably refers to the Levite, because it says “the man pushed his concubine out,” so it would fit that “the man” is the antecedent of “his” later in the verse. They abused her all night. At daybreak, they let her go, but she could not get back into the house. She crawled to the door and fell down dead (or close to it), her hands outstretched, trying to get in. In Genesis 19, fire from heaven descended to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their evil deeds. Here, daybreak came, and nothing happened. Where is God?

The next morning, the Levite got ready to go, walked out, and saw his concubine. He simply told her to get up so that they could hit the road. But she did not answer. He did not rush to help her or try to save her. He just walked by and said, “Hey, get up, let’s go.” How uncaring. All of our suspicions as to his character in the earlier verses are confirmed. What a terrible time in Israel’s history.



When the Levite got home, he took the corpse of his concubine, cut it in twelve pieces and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. He sent twelve pieces for the twelve tribes. How disgusting! It is like something out of a horrible horror movie. Was this a good thing or a bad thing? No matter what, it was a bizarre thing. We find out in the next chapter that the Levite did this out of self-pity, “poor me, look at what happened to me,” not out of any compassion for his dead concubine. He had no respect for her body. If he had loved her, he was supposed to have buried her body in respect and honor, not sent her across the land in mangled pieces via UPS.

The recipients of these bloody packages were horrified, remarking that such a thing had never happened or been seen from the Exodus to this day. What were they referring to? The rape or the ripping up of the concubine? Or both? Body parts in mailboxes would be something that had never been seen before. So, the Israelites planned to consider it, take counsel, and speak. What were their alternatives? How could they have responded? They could have repented for their own sins; they could have seen where their idolatry and unfaithfulness had taken them. They could have fasted, wept, and sought the LORD. But their reactions are all focused on themselves, not on the LORD. Indeed, it is a terrible time in Israel’s history. But it resulted in the tribes acting unified in a way they never had before under any judge, prophet, or deliverer. We will see how they acted in chapter 20.

What a horrible, horrible story we have before us. What can we learn from this passage? Why do we even have to read it? We would rather skip it. These things are so foreign, so alien, so bizarre. We feel dirty and gross when we read a passage such as this one. But we cannot let this passage make us become Pharisees, crying out, “Oh, LORD, I thank you that I

am not like those Gibeonites.” For the most horrible part of it is that this is a mirror of where we would be. This is not a story of the heathens, of the unconverted. This is a story of the Israelites, the “good guys.” Just because you are “in the church” does not mean you are clean. This is exactly where we would be, exactly how far we would fall if it were not for Christ.

One time in this lesson, I asked “Where is God?” That is probably a question that was on all of your minds. Where was God? The Israelites in this story have finally been abandoned by the LORD, and this is the end result. The people did not get here overnight. This was not the first step down the slippery slope. This whole book has shown us the downward spiral to this low point. I hope you and your churches are not down here. In most settings, I hope that you are near the top of the spiral, closer to Israel in chapter 1 than Israel in chapter 19. This chapter serves as a warning not to get proud. It shows us what happens when a society gets out of control, when they let go of the LORD. Romans 1 talks about this. People abandon God and are handed over to their sin, exchanging natural relationships for unnatural. The Gibeonites were completely given over to their sins.

This was not just any old evil society. These were God’s people. In Genesis 19, it was Sodom, a bunch of pagans who plumbed the depths of sin. Now, the people of God were in the Promised Land and they have built New Sodom within the limits of the Promised Land. They behaved exactly as the pagans they replaced. Actually, they behaved worse than the pagans they replaced! What is inevitably going to happen? God will curse and judge these people. There is a measure of that judgment in the next chapter, but also of grace, for this is not the end of the story of Israel. God does not destroy the entire nation. Judges is just a part of the long story of Israel. But Israel still ended up in exile. Why? All the books from Joshua to 2 Kings

answer that question. This chapter in Judges explains why: because Israel had become so much like the nations around them that the only response God could give was judgment. But even then, 2 Kings was not the end of the story. There is the New Testament, and all the prophets. Look at Ezekiel 16. This chapter is a description of the history of Jerusalem and its pagan origins. The people of Israel returned to the pagan practices of early Jerusalem and received judgment for them. But the unexpected part is that Jerusalem will be restored, along with her two sisters. Who does Ezekiel say Jerusalem’s sisters are? Samaria and Sodom. Samaria’s sin was idolatry (like the fake priesthood and golden calves, similar to Judges 17–18). Sodom’s sin was exactly what we found in Judges 19. This passage humbles Jerusalem by comparing her to those two cities, by pointing out that she is worse than they were. It is not through any merit of her own that Jerusalem is saved. Only the LORD’s mercy and grace are sufficient to take her and restore her.

Even if you see yourself at the top of the downward spiral, even if your behavior is more similar to Judges 1, just imagine what we would be like if we acted on the thoughts of our

hearts, no holds barred. We might look as good as the Pharisees on the outside, but on the inside, it is clear that we are all vicious sinners, as bad as the Gibeonites. Yes, just as bad as they were. If you acted out the sinful thoughts of your heart in this last week, just what would you be guilty of today? Murder, idolatry, fornication, all ten of the Commandments would be broken. In our hearts, we are every bit as defiled as the pagans around us. In our hearts, there is no difference between us and the pagans (Romans 3). All have sinned. This is why we need the gospel. This is why we need God’s free gift of grace in Jesus Christ. We need to be restored, just like Jerusalem. God, in His sovereignty, has decided to redeem the wicked through no merit of their own. There is no room for us to be proud or boastful, or to have any confidence in ourselves. All of the glory must go to God. There is hope even for those of us living in a Judges 19 situation, which is all of us in our hearts. We all need Christ desperately.

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## *Lesson 18: Points to Ponder*

1. Why does the author repeat the refrain, “In those days there was no king in Israel”?
2. How are those who call themselves Christians sometimes worse than their non-Christian neighbors?
3. How can we benefit from a study of these perverse activities of the Israelites?
4. Could something as horrible as this happen within the church today? Is this sin really worse than false worship?
5. How do the actions of the Gibeonites reinforce Romans 1?
6. Why did the Lord spare Israel while destroying Sodom?
7. What is the only way to get out of the downward spiral of our sinful hearts?

Last month we studied the doctrine of justification, the “hinge” on which the Protestant faith turns, according to John Calvin. John Murray described this as “the crux of the Reformation.” Justification by faith alone is the “hinge” or the “crux” because it understands faith as resting on and receiving the complete sufficiency of Christ for our salvation. The Roman Catholic approach to reconciliation of sinners with God was the process of moral renovation or sanctification, which yielded an infused righteousness, not an imputed righteousness from Christ’s own merits.

Herman Bavinck describes the genius of the Reformation in this way: “If human beings received the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, adoption as children, and eternal life through faith alone, by grace, through the merits of Christ, then they did not need to exert themselves to earn all of these benefits through good works. They already possessed them in advance as a gift they had accepted by faith.” In the words of the hymn,

By grace alone shall I inherit

That blissful home beyond  
the skies

Works count for naught,  
the Lord incarnate

Has won for me the heavenly prize.

As we have seen, justification by faith alone is a doctrine that protects the *solas* of the Reformation: faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone, and glory to God alone. More than that, it is a doctrine that is essential to the Christian life. It undergirds the doctrine of assurance and it reinforces our sober appraisal of the continuing presence of indwelling sin.

## Sin in the Christian Life

A striking feature of Calvin’s *Institutes* is its arrangement of the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) in book three. At first glance, it may seem odd to the reader that sanctification (chapters 3–10) precedes justification (chapters 11–16). This is Calvin’s way to put to rest the Roman Catholic charge of antinomianism. As Rome caricatured the Protestant teaching, it claimed that the forgiveness offered by Protestant Reformers removed any motivation for doing good works.

Calvin was eager to demonstrate, contrary to his Catholic opponents, that “actual holiness of life . . . is not separated from free imputation of righteousness” (593). In his careful treatment of this subject he underscores that the faith that receives the benefits of Christ is a living faith. Thus he demonstrates “how little devoid of good works is the faith” that justifies. Calvin’s organization was polemical; from the very start he wanted to dismiss the allegation that justification by faith alone bred indifference to the Christian’s pursuit of holiness.

Justification, Calvin and other Protestant Reformers argued, was never separated from sanctification. Together they comprised the two-fold grace of Christ’s mediation. Calvin outlined the process of sanctification as mortification (the crucifixion of the old man) and vivification (arising in newness of life). When a sinner takes proper estimate of his sin, “he then begins truly to hate and abhor sin; then he is heartily displeased with himself, he confesses himself miserable and lost and wishes to be another man.”

Calvin described sin as an abyss, a bottomless pit of infinite and innumerable transgressions. This is hardly rhetoric that can be considered antinomian. Confessional Protestants continue to confess the reality of indwelling sin. For example, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Directory for Worship includes a membership vow in which one is asked, “Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?”

In contrast, it is the Roman Catholic penitential system that is beset with a superficial understanding of sin. In his recent biography of Calvin, Herman Selderhuis observed that Rome “gave the impression that you could once a year, such as at Easter, drop off all your sins at church as if you were leaving a neat little package at the post office.” This way of understanding sin underestimates the pervasive presence of sin in the life of the believer. The restoration of the image of God in the believer involves a spiritual warfare that continues until our death. In Calvin’s words, sin is a “smoldering cinder of evil” even in the regenerate.

Yet the Reformers did not leave the Christian despairing over his sin. They acknowledged that God’s grace was equally infinite and able fully to atone for the sins of his people. But the triumph of grace in the heart of the believer does not mean that depravity had vanished from the Christian life. Believers are still sinners. For this reason repentance is a constant and lifelong demand for the Christian, and we must expect that it bears fruit in the form of self-denial and cross-bearing.

We cannot be content with securing indulgences or surviving purgatory.

## Justification and Its Discontents

At the heart of the Roman Catholic objection to justification by faith alone is its refusal to believe that imputed righteousness can deliver the “whole Christ” of salvation. Some Protestants today are making that same argument, and they are in the process displaying terrible confusion about sanctification. Bavinck writes that soon after the Reformation, Protestant sects developed the idea that justification by faith was “defective and incomplete and had to be augmented by sanctification.” Eighteenth-century Lutheran Pietism, for example, sought to “complete” the Reformation by a rigorous and legalistic construal of the Christian life. Similarly, John Wesley’s concept of the second blessing went on to describe sanctification as the “real change” in the believer (justification having accomplished merely a “relative change”). This devolved into perfectionism, the doctrine that some Christians can experience the complete eradication of sin in this present life.

Views like these divide the Christ of justification from the Christ of sanctification. One confused Reformed author recently proposed that no one can enjoy the benefits of the kingdom unless “fully conformed to the image of Christ in true and personal righteousness and holiness.” He went on to add that imputed righteousness does not suffice because the righteousness of the believer must be “real and personal.” Contrary to the author’s disclaimer, his formulation was consistent with Roman Catholicism. Both share a dismissal of the imputed righteousness of Christ as neither “real” or “personal.”

Of course, Roman Catholics claim to believe in justification. But it is really sanctification where they lodge

*The triumph of grace in the heart of the believer does not mean that depravity had vanished from the Christian life.*

their confidence. Confounding them is deadly. The key distinction was the location of the righteousness on the ground of which God accepts us. Is it something found in us or outside of us? Luther described the justifying righteousness as an “alien” righteousness. Calvin followed Luther: believers are “accounted righteous *outside themselves*.”

The separation of the doctrine of justification from the Christian life can be described, in most general terms, as the Pelagian temptation. As Michael Horton has observed, Pelagianism “is the default setting of the fallen heart ever since the fall.” In its crudest forms, modern Pelagianism argues for a Christian life through the challenge of finding and improving upon one’s inward potential. It is a journey of self-fulfillment, not self-denial. More subtle forms of this moralism deny the sufficiency of external and alien righteousness, and assert that it must be sustained by a righteousness that is infused, not imputed. Moralistic Protestants today tend to formulate sanctification in Rome-friendly ways. It is hardly surprising when conversions to Rome soon follow.

To be sure, Christians must (and will) lead the good life. They must strive after new obedience. Christianity is a pilgrimage, not a decision, and without holiness no one will see the Lord, the writer to the Hebrews warns. Does this mean that good works are “necessary” for our salvation? This is misleading language, which suggests some discontent with the blessing of justification. Bavinck answers this question cautiously when he argues that sanctification is necessary only “in the sense of presence.” Or to put

it in the language of the Westminster Confession, good works are necessary (and indeed, inevitable) as the “fruits and evidences” of that faith that justifies.

## Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude

For Protestants, therefore, the doctrine of justification, far from stifling good works, provides the only genuine motive for doing good works. We no longer do them to save ourselves and obtain divine favor. Only when we are right with God can we do good works, out of our love for his mercy. That is to say, gratitude is our motivation for the Christian life.

This truth underscores the priority that justification holds to sanctification. As Bavinck described it, “Logically, justification, which clears our guilt, precedes sanctification, which cleanses us from our pollution.” Justification makes good works possible. Calvin again: “For we dream neither of a faith devoid of good works nor of a justification that stands without them. This alone is of importance: having admitted that faith and good works must cleave together, we still lodge justification in faith, not in works. We have a ready explanation for doing this, provided we turn to Christ to whom our faith is directed and from whom it receives its full strength.” These works arise, Bavinck continues, out of our gratitude and joy at receiving all the benefits of Christ. Of course, Bavinck is echoing the language of the Heidelberg Catechism and its three-fold structure (or “triple knowledge”): Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude. Question and answer 86 makes this explicit:

Q. Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace,

through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, (a) and that he may be praised by us; (b) also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, (c) by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ.

At the same time, the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us that these good works are “imperfect and stained with sin” (Q/A 62), and thus “even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience” (Q/A 114). Similarly, the Westminster Confession of Faith discourages us from appraising our good works too highly. Our ability to do good works is “wholly from the Spirit of Christ,” and because our works come from fallen creatures “they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God’s judgment” (16.5). God views these sin-stained efforts through Christ’s imputed righteousness and thus He is able to accept them (cf. 16.6).

### Fruit and Evidence

False prophets today, such as Joel Osteen, offer the false hope of doing the best we can to find our “best life.” Roman Catholics offer the same counterfeit notion of the good life. The Reformation preserved the biblical teaching on justification’s “alien” and objective character. But the Reformers also insisted on the vital importance of the believer’s subjective renewal and growth in holiness. Moral renovation was not essential to justification, but rather an essential consequence and evidence of it. Sanctification is bound inseparably to justification. This double grace

works in the believer in two ways: by justification we stand righteous before God; by sanctification we grow in holiness. But the Reformers grounded sanctification in justification; unless a sinner understood his estate of sin and misery and the way into the estate of salvation through the perfect righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone, the Pelagian temptation would always prompt the believer to regard his own good works as a way to supplement Christ’s goodness and so contribute to his own salvation.

Good works are the fruit of the faith that justifies. Christ in us (his holiness imparted to us) is the evidence of Christ for us (his righteousness imputed to us). If we understand aright, we have confidence that we can indeed live the good life. We can faithfully serve God and neighbor in this world as we eagerly await the world to come. Those who make more of good works, who argue that it is essential in our salvation, who demand the “whole Christ” in their discontent with justification, will inevitably erode the assurance that justification provides.

Proper assessment of good works does not yield the antinomianism that Rome fears. But a false estimation of the character of good works can diminish our sober assessment of indwelling sin. That is the antinomianism to which Rome ironically succumbs. Discontented Protestants may be falling into the same dangerous way of thinking.

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# Bavinck the Dogmatician (7)

## The Doctrine of God's Knowability

Dr. Cornelis P.  
Venema



Graphite illustration of Herman Bavinck by Erik G. Lubbers.  
For more information on this image, see note at end of article.

In my previous articles on Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, I considered the introductory volume, which provides a comprehensive treatment of the discipline of dogmatics and the doctrine of revelation. According to Bavinck, Reformed dogmatics aims to summarize the teaching of the Word of God in conformity with the creeds and confessions and in the face of contemporary challenges to the Christian faith. As we have observed, in this introductory volume Bavinck offers a sustained defense of the dogma that undergirds all of Reformed theology, namely, that the Triune God has revealed himself to his creatures through general and special revelation, and that this revelation is a reliable source for a true knowledge of the living God.

With this article, I will begin to treat the second volume of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, which addresses the Scriptural revelation of God as the Creator of all things, especially of human beings as his image bearers. Obviously, I will not be able to offer more than a sketch of some of the principal themes of this volume. In this first article, I will consider Bavinck's understanding of the knowability of God. In subsequent articles on this volume, I will treat Bavinck's handling of such topics as the names and attributes of the Triune God, election, creation, and the original covenant relationship between the God and human beings in Adam.

### The Knowability of God

Bavinck opens his reflection on the knowability of God with a striking comment: "Mystery is the lifeblood of dogmatics" (RD 2:29). All theological knowledge is ultimately a knowledge of God, which is the "exclusive content" of the entire field of dogmatics. However, such knowledge cannot be grasped in the same way that the particular sciences grasp their subject matter. The knowledge of God always produces in us a response of adoration and worship. The Psalmist's exclamation—"great is the Lord and greatly to be praised"—is as true an expression for the theologian as it is for an ordinary believer. The knowledge of God that is communicated through creation

and Scripture "far surpasses human imagination and understanding." One of the great dangers that confronts the theologian who seeks to know God is the danger of pride or arrogance, which fails to marvel at the unfathomable greatness and grandeur of God.

In his reflection upon our knowledge of God, Bavinck endeavors to balance the reality and truth of our knowledge of God through revelation with the limits of any form of human apprehension of God. On the one hand, an inordinate stress upon the incomprehensibility of God leads to agnosticism, the view that any true knowledge of God is finally impossible. On the other hand, an exaggerated emphasis upon the

knowability of God leads to a loss of an appreciation for the infinite richness and fullness of God. The challenge facing the Christian theologian is to hold on to the knowability of God without compromising his absolute greatness. To deny the truth of our knowledge of God is to treat God's revelation of himself with ingratitude and contempt. But to deny the limits of our knowledge of God, even when it is based upon God's self-revelation, is to forget that the incomprehensibility of God belongs itself to a true knowledge of God. The acknowledgment of the limits of our capacity to know God in his fullness is an inescapable and significant feature of our positive knowledge of who God is.

Early in his treatment of the knowability of God, Bavinck challenges the claim of many "critical" biblical scholars that the doctrine of God undergoes a kind of evolutionary development in the Old Testament writings. According to critical biblical scholarship, the original conception of God in Israel was "polydaemonistic." Critical scholars maintain that the God of Israel was originally regarded as "a mountain god, a fire god, or a thunder god," and only after the conquest of Canaan did Israel come to view him as the "God of Israel's land and people" (RD 2:31). Only after a long period of time, especially in the ministry of the later prophets, did Israel begin to move from this early "polytheistic" and then "henotheistic" view of God to a more fully-developed "monotheism." Contrary to this misrepresentation of the biblical revelation of God, Bavinck identifies a number of consistent features of Old Testament revelation that are incompatible with any form of polytheism. Throughout the Old Testament God is revealed as a personal being, who is the self-existent Creator of heaven and earth. Though God reveals himself at particular times and places, he

remains the absolute Lord of all times and places, who surpasses the limitations of all creatures. Furthermore, the absolute yet personal God of the Old Testament Scriptures is never regarded as exhaustively coinciding with his self-revelation. Even in his revelation, God remains partially hidden and inscrutable, One who is "infinitely" exalted "above the whole realm of nature and every creature" (RD 2:33).

In addition to the challenge posed by critical biblical theologians, Bavinck also evaluates the challenges to the knowability of God that have been raised in ancient as well as more recent philosophy since the Enlightenment. Among some ancient Greek philosophers, any positive descriptions of God were viewed as inappropriately limiting who God is. The neo-Platonist philosopher, Plotinus, for example, regarded any attempt to name God or describe him in terms of positive attributes as a denial of his infinite being. In the modern era, philosophers like Kant and Fichte also rejected the possibility of any definite knowledge of God. According to these philosophers, human knowledge is limited by experience, and the knowledge of God as he truly is lies outside of the range of such experience. Theology or the knowledge of God within the framework of modern philosophy is limited to "religious experience" of God and ends in a kind of radical agnosticism. God is simply unknown and unknowable. The influence of modern philosophy upon theology has profoundly affected the confidence of Christian theologians regarding the possibility of any true knowledge of God. "Theology has so far fallen victim to the dread of this agnosticism that it hardly any longer dares to speak of a knowledge of God. It tries as much as possible to exclude all metaphysics (although of late we can see some reaction to this trend) and to restrict itself to the

realm of the religious. It has become ashamed of its own name and has allowed itself to be rebaptized into a science of religion." (RD 2:44). The consequences of this modern denial of the knowability of God are dire and undermine the most basic convictions of Christian theology. On the one hand, some are driven to conceive of God as no more than a finite, "personal, limited, humanlike being." On the other hand, others "strip our idea of God of all likeness to a finite creature, and end up with an empty abstract idea devoid of value for religion" (RD 2:47).

In Bavinck's view of the knowability of God, the only way forward for Christian theology is to affirm God's incomprehensibility and knowability at the same time. Rather than to deny the possibility of a true knowledge of God, we need to affirm the possibility of a knowledge of God that is derived from his revelation of himself. But at the same time, we must admit that all such knowledge of God is thoroughly "analogical." Because God is inexhaustibly rich in being and surpassingly greater than any finite creature, Christian theology must affirm the truth of God's incomprehensibility. "There is no name that fully expresses his being, no definition that captures him. He infinitely transcends our picture of him, our ideas of him, our language concerning him" (RD 2:47). This is the moment of truth in all denials of the simple knowability of God. However, Christian theology is not content to simply affirm the incomprehensibility of God. Since God has created all things and is pleased to reveal himself through the works of his hands, a true knowledge of God is possible on the basis of divine revelation.

The critical question that modern denials of the knowability of God raise is whether God "has willed and found a way to reveal himself in the domain of creatures" (RD 2:50). Such

denials really amount to a hostility toward the fundamental dogma of the Christian faith, namely, that God is able to disclose a true knowledge of himself through the works of his hands, and that human beings who bear his image are capable of apprehending that disclosure.

The knowledge we have of God is altogether unique. This knowledge may be called positive insofar as by it we recognize a being infinite and distinct from all finite creatures. On the other hand, it is negative because we cannot ascribe a single predicate to God as we conceive that

is an inexpugnable knowledge of God that is *implanted* in all human beings as image-bearers of God. And second, there is an *acquired* knowledge that builds upon the in-created capacity of human beings for a true knowledge of God. All knowledge of God is derived from God's revelation of himself to his image-bearers. However, there is a significant difference between the knowledge of God that is basic and foundational to what it means to be a creature created in God's image, and the knowledge of God that is acquired and derived from human reflection upon and apprehension of divine revelation.

*God has so created human beings after His image that all have an innate capacity for knowing Him.*

The first form of human knowledge of God is not so much acquired as implanted or "innate." According to Bavinck, since the entire creation and all of God's works constitute a kind of "theater of God's glory"

predicate in relation to creatures. It is therefore an *analogical* knowledge: a knowledge of a being who is unknowable in himself, yet able to make something of himself known in the being he created.

When Bavinck employs the term "analogical" for our knowledge of God, he means to affirm that we know God through his creatures. The creature bears some resemblance to the Creator. There is a likeness or similarity between the Creator and creature. Yet at the same time, God transcends and surpasses all creatures. Thus, our knowledge of God is by analogy: there is similarity and dissimilarity between God and his creatures.

### **The Knowledge of God: Implanted and Acquired**

After his opening treatment of the limits and basis for a true knowledge of God, Bavinck turns to the subject of how human beings actually come to know God. The knowledge of God is obtained in two ways. First, there

(Calvin), which bears unmistakable marks of God's handiwork, it is ultimately impossible to view the world atheistically. Even though there are "atheists" who endeavor to deny God's existence and knowability, their number is few and their cause is futile.<sup>1</sup> Even the vigor with which the atheist protests God's existence represents, ironically, the fact that the world is pervaded by a clear and undeniable testimony to the greatness and wisdom of its Creator. An inescapable "awareness of God" (Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*) belongs inherently and inescapably to the very fabric of human existence. All human beings are unable to eradicate this basic knowledge of God, which is the "seed of religion" (Calvin's *semen religionis*) and the only explanation for the fact that human beings are "incurably religious." However energetic or vigorous human beings may be in attempting to deny God and the things of God, this attempt is finally an exercise that is doomed to failure. God has so created the world

and fashioned human beings after his image that all have an innate and in-born instinct or capacity for knowing and serving him.

Bavinck notes that the presence of such a universal and pervasive awareness of God among human beings who bear God's image has prompted some to assert a doctrine of "innate ideas." Just as in various sciences there seem to be some ideas that are necessary, basic, and natural (for example, every "effect" has a "cause,"  $2 + 2 = 4$ , the distinction between "good" and "evil"), so it has been suggested in the history of theology that God has implanted a number of innate ideas regarding himself in the human mind. In order to account for those beliefs or convictions that seem to be universal, necessary, and basic to different sciences, including theology, philosophers and theologians have developed a doctrine that God implants such ideas in the human mind. Such innate ideas provide a kind of fund of knowledge that all human beings possess before they study some or another aspect of the created order. In the history of theology, the doctrine of innate ideas often played a significant role, and served as the basis for the development of a kind of natural theology or knowledge about God that is not based upon divine revelation.

In Bavinck's assessment of this doctrine of innate ideas, especially in the discipline of theology, he argues that it can easily encourage "rationalism" or "mysticism." Rationalism is the teaching that human beings, solely upon the basis of rational reflection, can know much about God's existence, nature, and relation to the creation. Without depending solely upon divine revelation as the exclusive source and norm for our knowledge of God, this rationalism makes human reason the measure and source for our most basic knowledge of God. It encourages

a kind of natural theology that is untethered from the Word of God, and grants to the creature the authority to derive a knowledge of God from within the resources of his own mind. Furthermore, just as the doctrine of innate ideas encourages rationalism, it also encourages mysticism, the notion that spiritual experience is the avenue by which God is first made known to human beings. Rather than seeking to know God through the medium of his revelation or Word, mysticism wants to experience God in some direct and unmediated manner. God is so closely linked with the human spirit or soul that any reliance upon an external source for the knowledge of God is viewed with suspicion or disparaged as a less direct form of access to God. Both rationalism and mysticism employ the notion of “innate ideas,” therefore, to establish human knowledge of God, not upon divine revelation through creation as a manifestation of God’s glory and wisdom, but upon human reason or experience.

However, this does not mean that Bavinck rejects entirely the idea of innate knowledge of God. For Bavinck, there is moment of truth in

the doctrine of innatism, namely, that God has created human beings in his image with an innate disposition and capacity for a true knowledge of God. In the same way that human sight requires the light of the sun and eyes with which to see that light, human knowledge of God requires the light of divine revelation and the created capacity to apprehend and know what it discloses regarding God. According to Bavinck, “[a]ll knowledge rests in faith” in the sense that the human knower must be convinced of certain “self-evident” and “basic” principles that underlie all study of God’s creation. For example, the science of ethics depends upon the fundamental assumption that there is a distinction between “right” and “wrong.” Even sciences like mathematics and physics require the assumption of certain abstract and necessary principles, such as the theory of numbers or the orderliness of the physical world. The science of theology or the knowledge of God likewise assumes the existence

and knowability of God. Just as the scientist cannot reason his way to the conviction of the existence or order of what he studies, but assume it, so the theologian proceeds from the basic and undeniable truth of God and his revelation of himself.

“Implanted knowledge of God” does not mean that all people are immediately endowed by God himself with sufficient knowledge so as to be able to dispense with revelation. The term does not say that we are able, all by ourselves, to deduce conscious, clear, and valid knowledge of God from the contents of our own

*All actual knowledge of God derives from a proper apprehension of divine revelation.*

minds. What it does say is that we possess both the *capacity* (aptitude, faculty) and the *inclination* (*habitus*, disposition) to arrive at some firm, certain, and unfailing knowledge of God. (RD 2:71)



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Because God has created in human beings for fellowship with himself, and because human self-knowledge is never separable from the knowledge of God, we must insist that human beings will, in the natural course of their development and without “laborious reasoning,” arrive at convictions regarding God’s existence and nature that are self-evident and undeniable. When atheism claims to deny God’s existence, therefore, it takes an unnatural, and ultimately impossible, position in relation to God whose existence is self-evident to all right thinking people.

Within the framework of this understanding of the innate capacity and disposition of all human beings for a true knowledge of God, Bavinck proceeds to observe that all actual knowledge of God derives from a proper apprehension of divine revelation. Contrary to the views of rationalism and mysticism, human knowledge of God depends completely upon an “objective” revelation of God that comes from “outside of” the creature and makes its impression upon us. The implanted knowledge of God, which consists in our capacity to know God, must be accompanied by an acquired knowledge of God, which finds its source in God’s works and Word. All true knowledge of God is governed by the truth that God’s Word is “light,” and we only see the light through a careful study and reflection upon that Word.

In his discussion of such acquired knowledge of God, Bavinck makes an especially important observation about the legitimacy of “natural theology” in relation to our apprehension of divine revelation. Though some theologians (and traditions, for example, the Roman Catholic Church) have maintained that human beings can know much about God through human reason and reflection upon the created order apart from any use of special

revelation, Bavinck notes that this represents a faulty view of revelation and human ability to know God through his revelation. Even so-called “natural theology,” which aims to know something about God through the creation itself and apart from special revelation, can only proceed upon the basis of the Christian conviction that the world belongs to God.

Furthermore, there are two errors that underlie the claim that a natural theology is possible upon the basis of human reason alone and without the light of Scriptural revelation. The first error is the assumption that our natural disposition to know God as creatures created in his image has not been seriously impaired through sinful disobedience and hostility toward God. Our natural inclination to know God has been terribly corrupted, and for this reason the Scriptures often speak of unbelief as a kind of culpable “blindness” to the truth. The second error is the assumption that it is possible for a Christian to dispense with what he knows from Scriptural revelation, even about God as the Creator of all things, in the pursuit of a true knowledge of God, whether it be a knowledge of the created order or the way of redemption. “The natural knowledge of God is incorporated and set forth at length in Scripture itself. Accordingly, Christians follow a completely mistaken method when, in treating natural theology, they, as it were, divest themselves of God’s special revelation in Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, discuss it apart from any Christian presuppositions, and then move on to special revelation” (RD 2:74). In seeking to know God through the works of his hands, Christians make grateful use of the fullness of divine revelation in creation and the Word of God. It would be an impoverishment, even an impossibility for the believer, to seek to know God through his works without the full enlightenment

provided in the entirety of his revelation of himself.

## **The So-Called “Proofs” for God’s Existence**

The final topic Bavinck considers in his extended treatment of the knowability of God is that of the so-called “proofs” for God’s existence. This topic naturally arises in the context of Bavinck’s treatment of the implanted and acquired knowledge of God, because it has historically been an important feature of “natural theology.” In the history of theology, the proofs for God’s existence have often been viewed as “preambles to faith.” Before deriving the knowledge of God from inscripturated revelation, proponents of these proofs have frequently maintained that the theologian needs to demonstrate God’s existence and knowability by offering rational proofs or arguments that will establish a foundation for the distinctive knowledge of God that belongs to the Christian faith.

In Bavinck’s estimation, these so-called “proofs” for the existence of God play an important and legitimate role in theology, provided they are not formulated in a way that denies the prior and basic knowledge of God that belongs to all human beings who bear God’s image. Since all knowledge of God derives from a proper apprehension of what God reveals everywhere and to all about himself, and since this knowledge is basic and undeniable, the proofs may not be viewed so much as proofs but as “testimonies” to what all human beings already know and believe. The whole creation eloquently testifies to God’s existence as the almighty and wise Creator of all things. The Scriptures furthermore proceed throughout on the basis of the self-evidence of God’s existence. Never do the Scriptural writers pause to prove by such arguments that God exists, and then move to present a further disclosure of God’s will and purpose. All human beings already know and

believe what these proofs endeavor to express in a more “elaborate” and “dialectical” form. The knowledge of God, whether derived from creation or Scripture, does not wait for such proofs. Rather, these so-called proofs are a kind of further unfolding of what all human beings already (or ought to) know in germinal and basic form.

Though Bavinck acknowledges that there has been a long tradition of treating these proofs as “rational” demonstrations of God’s existence, which provide a kind of foundation upon which faith may build further, he seeks to view and formulate them within a “religious” context. When we proceed from a settled conviction regarding God’s existence and knowability, these proofs serve to testify to the intellectual integrity and knowledge of faith. They provide a kind of intelligent exposition of the knowledge of God that is the possession of every believer. Each of them formulates what we know about God as the Author and Creator of all things.

In his positive exposition of these proofs, Bavinck notes that they can easily be distinguished into three groups: first, two of the proofs (the cosmological and the teleological argument) deduce the existence of God from the world’s “origin and purpose”; second, two of the proofs deduce the existence of God from the rational and moral nature of human beings (the ontological and the moral argument); and third, the last two proofs deduce God’s existence from the universal consent and history of humankind.

Rather than attempt to offer anything like a summary of these proofs, I will only illustrate how they serve to testify to the knowledge of God that all believers possess—whether they

can understand, follow, or begin to articulate what they already know in the form of a sophisticated statement of the argument. Perhaps the easiest way to appreciate these arguments is to regard them as answers to certain inescapable questions. For example, consider such questions as the following: 1) what accounts for the existence of anything at all?; 2) has the world always existed or was it created out of nothing?; 3) what explains the amazing diversity and inter-relationship of all things?; 4) why do all people have an irrepressible conviction of the difference between “good” and “evil”?; 5) what accounts for the fact that human beings seem to have an irresistible inclination to worship or “idolize” someone or something?; 6) how can we account for the existence of the human eye, with its amazing complexity and facility; 7) could “blind chance” or unintelligent process produce the kind of world we know?; 7) what accounts for the apparent wisdom and design of the world?; and 8) how can we even be sure of the uniform order and consistency of what we study in the various sciences, if the existence of the Creator is denied?

Though questions like these could easily be multiplied, they illustrate what the so-called proofs for God’s existence endeavor to explain further. These proofs, when formulated from the standpoint of the Christian faith and informed by the fullness of divine revelation, serve to testify to the reality of the God whom all human beings already know. Though they may not convince the atheist or the agnostic, they do not fail to do so because of any weakness in their testimony to the truth. Rather, they illustrate how in the case of the unbelieving, the adage remains true—“there is none so blind as he who will not see, none so deaf as he who will not hear.”

## Conclusion

For Bavinck, there are two errors that often accompany our reflection on the knowledge of God. One error is the tendency to exaggerate our knowledge of God and to diminish God’s incomprehensible greatness. The other error is the denial of the possibility of a true knowledge of God based upon divine revelation. God is knowable by human beings because the whole of creation and all of the works of God’s hands constitute an undeniable and inescapable testimony to his power and wisdom. All human beings are created with a sense and capacity for a knowledge of God, and all are given through divine revelation a compelling testimony to who he is. Atheism and agnosticism represent, therefore, culpable forms of human perversity in suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.

With this broad introduction to the knowability of God, we turn in our next article to Bavinck’s understanding of the names and attributes of the Triune God.

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1. For a confirmation of Bavinck’s observations about atheism, see a recent book by Michael Novak, *No One Sees God: The Dark Night of Atheists and Believers* (New York: Doubleday, 2008). Novak treats several recent books by well-known atheists, included Richard Dawkins, and observes the passion with which they oppose any belief in God. Reading these atheistic authors prompts the retort, “methinks they protest too much.”

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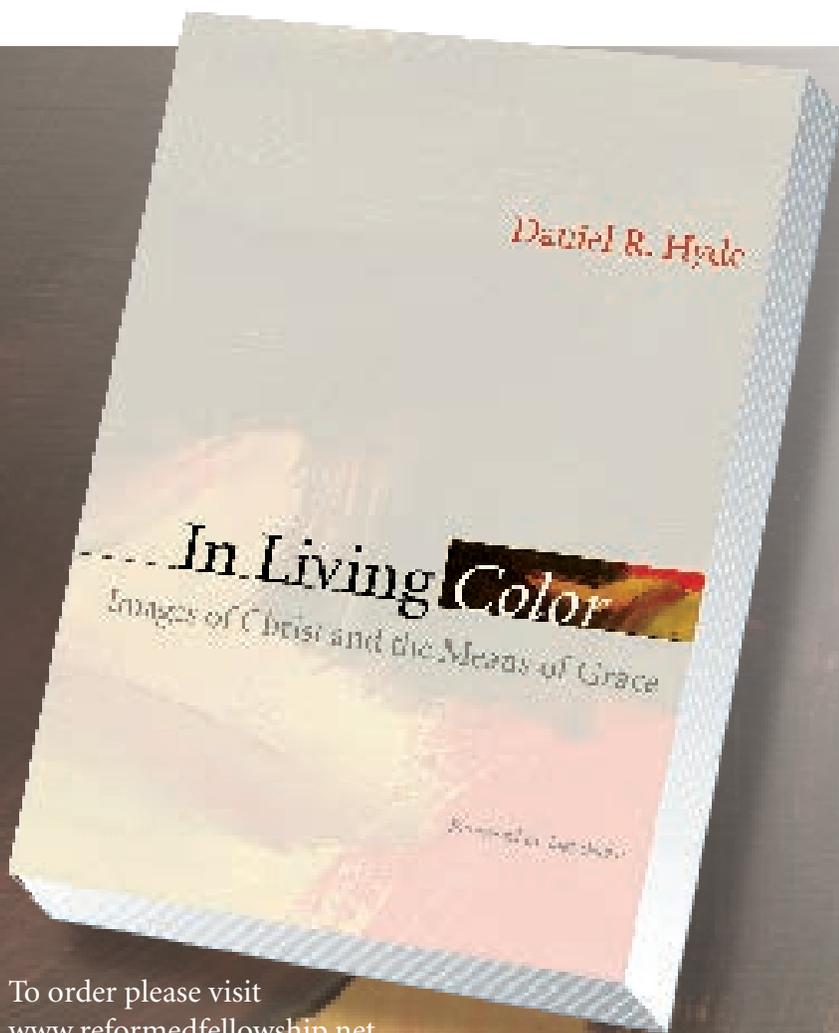
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